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FREDERICK WATSON

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ALL ABOUT ROB WERE HOARSE CRIES, GROANS, EDDYING SMOKE, AND THE ROAR AND CLATTER OF ARMS.

MUCKLE JOHN

BY

FREDERICK WATSON

AUTHOR OF "SHALLOWS"

WITH FOUR PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
IN COLOUR BY

ALLAN STEWART

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TO

MRS. STEPHEN WILLIAMSON

MY FATHER'S FRIEND

AND MINE

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FOREWORD

ALL the world knows the tale of the Rising of 1745. It is a story that each generation cherishes with undiminished affection. Some have called it the last burst of chivalry in modern history, and doubtless for that reason when other more vital aspects are forgotten, the campaign of Prince Charlie will sustain its fascination and its glamour.

In an age peculiarly commonplace and sordid, it carried the spirit of romance well-nigh to the throne itself; in a period almost destitute of loyalty and patriotism it glorified the reckless gallantry and self-sacrifice of devotion.

That Charles Edward Stuart could land with only seven followers and carry all before him into the very heart of England is wonderful enough. But that in the days of his misfortune and flight no one was found to claim the reward for his life is finer still. That poor, unarmed, uneducated men were ready to die in hundreds is a testimony not easily forgotten.

Of those great days when the Jacobite army marched south much has been written, and the facts are familiar to all. But of

those grey days following Culloden Moor less is known, and in the last fluttering of the Jacobite Cause there is much that must necessarily baffle and perplex the casual reader.

The Highlands were to a large extent divided in opinion. There were Jacobite clans, and Hanoverian clans, while between the two were men like Major Fraser of our story, anxious to keep clear of both. There were devoted chiefs like Lochiel, scheming chiefs like Lovat, chiefs who wavered and trifled like Macleod, or were downright traitors like Glengarry and Barisdale, and there were the tragi-comedians like poor Murray of Broughton, who was more hated than he deserved.

Finally there were, like poppies in the grain, the adventurers, men with nothing to lose and something to gain (such as Muckle John himself), serving no chief, nor clan, marauders more Jacobite than Hanoverian, like birds of prey hovering for the kill. It is of this side of the '45 that I have principally treated.

Clan jealousies again must not be forgotten, and the universal hatred of the Campbells played, as always, its miserable part. Those who condemn Cumberland and his troops must not forget that in the persecution after Culloden the hunting down of the fugitives was ardently pursued by the Highland militia and the men from Argyllshire.

The story of a campaign is but a lightning flash in the history of a nation. Long after, the thunder rolls into silence. The Rebellion of the '45 was only the fuse that destroyed at a blow the clan system of centuries. From Culloden onwards the transit of the old into the new was swift and tragic in its coming.

FREDERICK WATSON

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

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MUCKLE JOHN

CHAPTER I

HOW PRINCE CHARLIE CAME TO INVERNESS

It is often your stupidest boy who is most likeable in a helpless sort of way. Not that Rob Fraser was a nincompoop, but there was a confiding innocency in his shadowless blue eyes that only a rascal could have turned to his own advantage.

Rob was not accounted promising at school, and during the study of such subjects as Latin and Greek his mind appeared to be focussed upon the next county, nor was he regarded as reliable at games, for his movements were in tune with his thoughts, which were more often on the trout in the pool than on the ball in his hand.

It was this abstraction that divided him from the other boys of his age, not because he was unpopular, not because he lacked pluck, but just because he was silent for days at a time, and made no confidences. It was a state of mind that drove his aunt, good woman, to a kind of arctic fury. For years she strove to beat it out of him, but it served no purpose except to send him upon the hills for days together.

There comes a time when you can't beat a boy

larger than yourself. Not that Rob would have complained or refused to submit. He was indifferent to such things. He had plenty of spirit of a dogged and inflammatory character, but it did not lie that way. If it consoled his aunt to beat him, then let her do so by all means. For all he knew it might be the time-honoured custom of maiden aunts.

Miss Macpherson was, above all, a practical woman, and it was Rob's dreamy obliviousness to facts that fretted her. To sit watching muirfowl for hours together was more than any sensible body could tolerate. And that was Rob all over. He knew where the two-pound trout lay in the burn up in the hills. He could bring a curlew from the next glen in a perfect frenzy of agitation to learn what was the matter. He would spend nights together watching fox cubs playing under the moon. But of school and its tasks he had no tolerance.

He was lying on the bank of a stream that spring day when it all came about. He did not hear the footsteps nor did he see the shadow on the water, but of a sudden there stood a very large and pleasant gentleman beside him, dressed in riding clothes, and with a handsome claymore at his side.

"Guddling?" said he very affably. "I mind the day when I could lay the bonnie ones in rows upon the bank."

Rob stared at him with his ingenuous eyes.

"It is fine to be young," went on the strange gentleman, "but there were no days like the old days."

"Why do you say that?" asked Rob.

The stranger suppressed a smile at his eager curiosity.

"They have said that," he replied, "since Robert the Bruce heard it from his grandfather."

"But were the old days so fine?"

"Fine enough," he replied absently; "fine enough and yet none sae fine either—there is a bit tune I'm minded of . . ." and he took a curious little instrument out of his pocket made of reed, shaped like a piccolo.

Then sitting upon a rock he played a tender little air with one eye glued to Rob to see how he took it, and his head cocked very drolly upon the side.

"There's the 'Brogues of Fortune' for ye," he said.

"Is it a very old tune?" asked Rob, greatly taken with the gentleman.

"As old as the hills, laddie, and that's past counting—as old as the burn and the shadows on the brae, for it's part and parcel of them all, just strung together by mysel'."

"You made it?"

"Hech! there's nothing to skirl about. I make them all day. I canna eat my dinner but

my feet are dirling to a tune that has no name and must have the go-by until I have a spare moment. Make them indeed!"

"What else do you do?" asked Rob, in his innocent blunt way.

The stranger laughed.

"I can hear the owl passing over the brae in the night, I can see the stag hunkered amongst the crags, I can catch the otter at his play."

"Can you call the weasel from his hole?" asked Rob.

"Maybe I can," replied the other, "but try you first."

At that, getting rather red in the face, Rob uttered a thin squeal such as a wounded rabbit gives, like the squeal of a rat for shrillness. Again and again he made it, but nothing moved in the broken place under the bank.

"None so bad," said the stranger, and distending his lips he sent forth such a screech that it froze Rob's blood. In it was the terror of the chase—the fear of what was following, and the drawing of blood.

And before their eyes, not four feet away, at the very first note the lithe form of a weasel leapt quivering upon the heather.

"It takes a deal of practice," said the stranger gentleman for fear he might seem overproud.

But Rob was utterly crushed.

Back dived the weasel for his lair, and lying down, the stranger told Rob of the ways of wild

things until it was dusk. Presently without so much as a good-day but only a nod he buttoned his coat and crossing the burn set off up the hill, and Rob saw him no more, at least not for two full years and over, not indeed until the Jacobites came to Inverness in the year '46.

It was about nine of the clock on the morning of February the 18th, 1746, that two horsemen rode into the town of Inverness.

Now there might seem nothing strange in that, but rather in the manner of their coming, which was at a headlong gallop. Rob Fraser, hurrying to the Grammar School, had scarce time to leap aside as they careered up Church Street, their beasts in a lather with sweat. Rob gave them one quick glance as they thundered by, noting that one had lost his hat, and the other his stirrup-irons; that both horses were fresh, grass fed beasts new from the fields, and then, on swift, light feet he sped in pursuit.

The Grammar School saw little of Rob when promise of news was going. For it must be told that in the year 1746 Inverness was in a rare tumult, and none knew just how the future lay.

In August of the preceding year Prince Charles Edward Stuart had landed in Scotland, had won the clans to his banner, had defeated the Government forces at Prestonpans, and had marched into England. Receiving no

support in the south, he returned to the north with his gallant little army. Then came the second victory at Falkirk, and the retreat towards Inverness with the Duke of Cumberland on their trail.

It was at such a time that two horsemen galloping recklessly through the streets of Inverness were bound to create a commotion. None could say what would befall within the next few weeks. Inverness was Jacobite by instinct; but there was no pleasant flavour about the word "rebel." In truth, the good people of the town were at their wits' end to know which way to cry.

But not so Rob Fraser. Despite the opinions of his father, despite the sour words of Ephraim Macaulay, the schoolmaster, and the dour face of the minister—Rob Fraser was a Jacobite beyond recall.

For a boy of sixteen he was slightly built, but lithe and wiry as a hill-fox. His hair was longer than is customary to-day, and covered by a broad blue bonnet. His features were regular and clean-cut, the eyes dark and sombre, his cheeks and neck tanned by wind and wild weather. In his rough jacket and faded kilt, with his torn and patched stockings and his soaking brogues, he made a queer enough spectacle—not one would say the ideal picture of a hero of romance. He wore no sporran, such luxuries were not for him, and his kilt

was but a roll of tartan belted about his middle, but he carried himself with all the dignity of his race. He was a schoolboy, but out of school he was a Fraser, and were the Frasers not in the field with the Master of Lovat? Those were days when schoolboys had small time for lessons. Only the night before Lauchlain Macintosh had eluded the sentinels and given warning of the plan to capture Prince Charlie at Moy Hall. There was no speaking to Lauchlain at the Grammar School for months after. Indeed, things were too critical for sums and tags of grammar. Already the Prince was threatening Inverness. At any moment there might be a battle at the very gates of the town, and who could say what might happen then?

Meanwhile the two horsemen had pulled up their steaming beasts in the market place, and the one who had lost his hat raised himself in his stirrups and shouted for silence. Rob, worming his way through the people, arrived in time to hear his opening words.

"We have ridden hot-foot," the man cried, speaking in Gaelic, "for the Pretender's army is even now marching on your town."

At that there was a sudden clamour of voices, some cheering, and not a little hooting, for the name "Pretender" was not pleasant in Jacobite ears.

But Inverness was in Hanoverian hands, and so the noise died away, and all eyes were

turned again upon the man on the horse. He was a great, red-faced fellow, very pompous and self sufficient, and had his hair not looked so laughable through the loss of his hat, might have impressed his auditors enormously.

The news he had brought sent a strange stir through the town. People began to talk in little clusters in the roadway, taverns quickly filled with gossipers, shutters began to rattle together, and anxious faces peered round the corners of windows.

Suddenly down the street sounded the tramp of feet, and a score of excited eyes were turned in the hope of seeing the Highland army march into the town. But no—it was the Hanoverian garrison some two thousand strong, commanded by Lord Loudon, about to evacuate. At that the confusion grew more intense, and ardent Jacobites could scarce refrain from donning the white cockade, while less ardent Hanoverians did not know whether to cheer or take to flight, and honest tradesfolk wore long faces thinking of their goods, for who could protect them against wild, Highland caterans, hungry from long marching ?

Rob slipped from group to group, listening to a word here and there, feeling a bitter contempt in his heart for these people of streets and shops.

The Hanoverian soldiers had passed out of Inverness by midday, and crossing the Moray Firth retired into Ross-shire, and still the

clatter of voices went on, and here and there a group of men were walking the streets with claymores at their sides, ready for the arrival of the Prince. At last Rob Fraser, grown weary of idling, turned in the direction of the school, and stealing inside the doorway was astonished to find it very quiet and empty, and with no sign of boy or master.

Of that master, whose name was the strange one of Ephraim Macaulay, something must be said.

He had arrived in Inverness three months earlier, on the introduction of the Lord President Forbes, and his predecessor had been asked to retire. The whole business was very mysterious. Some said the old schoolmaster (who was a whole-hearted Jacobite) would return, and others that he was in disgrace with the Government, and counted as a conspirator for the Stuarts. At any rate, Mr. Macaulay appeared, and from the moment he had entered the place Rob had hated him with all his heart.

Mr. Macaulay was an exceedingly tall, thin man, very straight and smileless, with a long, hatchet face. He was decently dressed in black clothes, and wore silver buckles on his shoes, but there was something strange in his manner, and in his secrecy, and there had been rumours that he saw overmuch of Lord Loudon. In his aspect there was a strong resemblance to a hawk, through his habit of staring unblinkingly

into space. For minutes together he would stand thus, and then of a sudden he would start and stare keenly about him with his sombre black eyes, and awaken, as it were, to his duties, which he seemed to find utterly irksome and dejecting.

Rob went on tiptoe into the room where he was in the habit of listening (somewhat absently) to the words of Ephraim Macaulay, and crossing the floor, peered into the shadowy passage which led to the schoolmaster's study.

The door was ajar, and from the room beyond came the sound of voices, a low grumble in deep undertones, as though two men were in close conversation—and very full of it. He heard a chair fall as though a man had sprung to his feet, and while he hesitated Mr. Macaulay cried "Muckle John" in a tone of surprise and agitation. "In Inverness," replied another voice strange to Rob.

Rob turned to steal away, but even as he did so the murmur of voices ceased, and before he could make off, the study door was flung back, and the long arm of the schoolmaster shot out and clutched his shoulder. It was so quickly done that he could not even duck for safety, and before he could shake himself free, the master's companion had cut off his retreat and gripped his arms. He had been caught eavesdropping.

Mr. Macaulay glanced at Rob with un-

mistakable malice, then, springing to his feet, he laid hands upon his cane.

"What have ye heard?" he asked sharply, but with anxiety written all over his face.

"Nothing," said Rob stoutly, "I did not know there was any one there."

"Come, Rob," said the master speaking with a strong lowland accent, "I'll leather ye for eavesdropping if for nothing else," and he began slowly approaching, his fingers twitching at his sides, moistening his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Are ye ready, Rob?" he said, passing round the table, his head thrust forward, and a grim smile upon his face.

The boy took a step backward, so that a stool lay between them, and flung a glance about him for a way of escape. To his back lay the fireplace, and to his right the open window, but high up and so small that only a cat could have reached it and passed through.

"You've learned your new trade quickly," said the stranger with a chuckle. It struck Rob, desperate though he was, as an odd thing to say.

Meanwhile the schoolmaster had begun to slowly unbutton his coat, and to turn back his shirtsleeves. His companion had seated himself near the door—to leave ample space for what was to come. The seconds were flying, and still Rob stood, his eyes darting hither and thither, until suddenly they rested

upon the wall above the fireplace. Now an ancestor of the former master had been a man of some prowess, and it was his claymore which hung over the mantel-shelf, and so fascinated Rob's eyes. The basket hilt hung down to within three feet of his arm. Could he but reach that!

Slowly Mr. Macaulay folded his coat and laid it down. He relished this prolonging of agony. It was never his way to have done with a thing. He even waved the cane a little, the better to find its balance. And then with a swift spring Rob had leaped upon the stool and gripped the sword upon the wall.

Uttering a cry of rage, the schoolmaster sent his cane whistling downwards, but it fell short, and with a great wrench, Rob ripped the claymore free, and sent it whirling in a circle about him.

And at that moment, far away, rising and falling, the flaunting skirl of the bagpipes came floating in through the open window. For a moment they all stood like people in a tableau.

"The Pretender!" gasped the stranger, springing up.

The schoolmaster let the cane slide from his fingers upon the floor.

"Humph!" said he, eyeing Rob, "it's like we'll postpone your beating, my lad." He gloomed a little with a heavy frown upon his

face, then slowly unlocking the door, he stood aside for him to pass. But when he saw Rob still retained the sword he hesitated and laid a hand upon the boy's arm.

"What's the meaning o' this?" he asked.

"It means," returned Rob, with head erect, "that I'm no pupil of yours, Mr. Macaulay—but a soldier, should the Prince have me."

"Oh, he'll have ye right enough," sneered the master; "he's nane sae many, and rope is cheap. Good-bye, my bonny recruit. We'll meet again belike."

Taking no notice of his words, Rob hurried to the doorway and out upon the road.

The clangour of the bagpipes was filling the narrow streets and the cheers of the townspeople rose and fell as the Prince's troops marched past.

Suddenly the volume of sound grew deafening, and hats were flung into the air on every side. For a moment he caught a glimpse of a young man riding upon a bay horse who smiled and nodded his head, holding his bonnet in his hand.

And in that swift vision Rob knew him for Prince Charlie, for whom he was prepared to risk his life.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF MUCKLE JOHN

THE muffled tramp of feet went beating past along the road. That such an army should have caused such utter panic to the English throne and sent London into a condition of wild terror, was amazing, and must ever remain so. Ill clad, poorly armed, ragged, gaunt, undisciplined, it presented a spectacle more like an assemblage of starved vagrants than conquering soldiery.

Many were quite old men, many were stunted, sickly creatures, coughing terribly as they limped along. Boys, many without shoes or stockings, some not more than sixteen, made up a goodly part of that desperate force. Many of those who owned swords had them tied about their waists with ropes of straw. Perhaps a third of the entire force were capably equipped with targe, claymore and dirk, while a number had firelocks slung across their backs.

They may have been dusty, ragged, footsore, but to Rob they were heroes of romance. He looked beyond their haggard faces and their bleeding feet and shabby clothes. They were a veteran army as yet unbeaten. They carried themselves with the confidence of victory,

accepting the cheers of Inverness with the air of men receiving their due.

Through a sort of mist Rob saw the tartans swinging, looked into unknown bearded faces, caught the glint of sunlight upon the cold whiteness of steel. The crowd about him began to thin; the last of the troops had passed. Already the road was a swaying, excited tumult of people.

Now at the back of Rob there stood a tavern owned by Major Fraser of Castleleathers, a former friend of Lord Lovat, but fallen into adversity. He was a great rubicund man some sixty-six years of age, and with no particular interest in either Jacobite or Whig. Rob knew him well. Many a happy evening had he spent listening to his stories of the great days of long ago.

Major Fraser thought things had come to a pretty pass when English troops were hounding good folk about the country side. Rob heard him say so from the tavern door. He was standing on the top step staring with half-closed eyes after the disappearing Highlanders. Above his broad red forehead, his white hair was fluttering in the quirky February wind.

"That you, Rob," he cried, "come your ways in lad," and he shivered and stamped within. Rob at his heels.

Inside the taproom there was a solitary occupant. He had evidently never stirred for

the tumult outside, for his legs were upon the mantel-shelf, and his head was sunk upon his chest. All Rob could see was a very broad back and a great red neck. He took him to be an exceedingly powerful individual, and one more used to the saddle or the hills than taverns.

"Have they passed?" growled the man at the fire, in a deep contemptuous voice.

"They have," replied Castleleathers, shutting the door, "and Frasers amongst them."

"Like enough, and the Master but a boy, James, fresh from college. His father has muckle to answer for."

"I ken fine, but who knows how this will end? I'd no break my heart if old Sim had his neck thrawn. . . ."

The man at the fire brought down his feet with a bang and swerved about on his chair. To Rob there was something strangely familiar about him.

"Leave your bad debts to me," he said, "I have a bone to pick with Lovat, and. . ." then seeing Rob, his eyes narrowed and he fell into a sudden silence.

"Whist!" said Castleleathers, "it's only Rob."

But the other said nothing further, only frowning at them both, and then of a sudden he uttered a low whistle, staring over their shoulders.

Now the window was some four feet above

the ground—one single pane—and peering through it was Ephraim Macaulay, the schoolmaster. For a single instant Rob saw him, then with a bound the stranger was at the door. He stood gazing up and down the street for a moment, then returned.

"James," he said, "I knew I was right, and when I see yon face I scent trouble brewing just as surely as when the corbies come sailing over the brae."

"It's the schoolmaster," said Rob.

But neither heeded him, and without a word the Major took him by the shoulders and pushed him out into the street, securely locking the door behind him. With the strangeness of it all fresh upon him Rob clutched his claymore and began to make his way homewards. He wondered where he had seen the great man in Fraser's tavern before, or whether he had dreamed of him. The memory of him though baffling, was curiously vivid in its way.

Rob lodged with his aunt, his mother's sister, and was not ashamed to admit that he had a wholesome terror for Miss Margaret Macpherson. What would she say to his plans? What, indeed?

Miss Macpherson was very tall and exceedingly gaunt. Her countenance was as bleak as a wind-swept hillside, and there was a stony glare in her grey eyes which seemed to turn the very atmosphere to frost. Her figure was all points and angles—jutting out where her

shoulders rose towards her neck, and seeming to extend indefinitely into her arms. Rob knew those long, sinewy arms with their thin, gnarled hands ever ready to swoop. Miss Macpherson's customary attitude was like that of a great bird of prey, mightily beaked and clawed, pouncing swiftly, and rising again to sit and watch upon a crag.

She was sitting before the fire as he entered, and when she saw the sword in his hand there came over her grim countenance a quick change—a swift tightening, as though she had received a shock but would not own to it.

"Aunt Margaret," said Rob, with a rush to get it over, "I'm marching with Prince Charlie's men to-morrow."

She made as though to rise, then sat where she was, only her hands trembled as she held them to the fire.

"So schooling's over," she said, quietly, "and now we're off to the wars, are we? A fine spectacle that will be for your father's son. It's the gallows now, is it, along with a rag-tag and a bonny Prince? Ye'll want a polish to this sword, I'm thinking, and some bannocks for your travels. Oh, I'll cook ye bannocks, my mannie—fine, hot bannocks."

She watched him narrowly, all the time, wishing to frighten him, and finding that he remained unshaken she shrugged her shoulders and set about laying the table, her long, thin arms

clutching the dishes. Rob noted with dejected eyes, that she was setting the things for one.

"How old are ye?" she asked at last, her back still turned.

"Sixteen past," he answered, slowly.

"Aye," said she, "I suppose ye are."

She stared at him then with a queer look in her face—as though she would have beaten him had she been able. Then, placing another platter upon the table, she jerked her head at him to sit beside her.

"Rob," she said, after a long silence, "to me you have always been undergrown for your years. It seems but yesterday since ye came."

"It was eight years ago," he answered, still upon his guard.

"So long?" said she, and took up her knife, but eating nothing.

The meal proceeded in utter silence. Rob would have given a world to be away. What was in his aunt's mind he did not know, he could not guess. Her face expressed nothing, only her eyes stared at him unblinkingly, like the unfathomable eyes of an eagle.

"Rob," said she, at last, "when do you get your marching orders?"

"To-morrow, Aunt Margaret," he replied. "You must not be grieved at my going; I cannot bide here when my people are out. Of course, we may not leave Inverness for a while."

"Yon old fox, Lovat, is safe at home," she retorted. "When the chief bides it is not good for the clansmen to stir."

"But the Master is out," he hastened to add, referring to Lord Lovat's son, who was in command of the clan Fraser.

"It is the sly pussie sits on the top of the wall. Well, well," she concluded, "what's done's done, and so off to bed wi' ye, and get your sleep."

Rob, concealing his delight at his aunt's apparent complacency, rose to his feet, and wishing her a very good night—for which she thanked him grimly—betook himself to the adjoining room, and flinging himself down on his bed was soon fast asleep.

It was pitch dark when he awoke some two hours later, and he awakened so suddenly that he started up in bed listening intently. Surely somebody had spoken in the room! But there was no sound, only the crying of the night wind in the street outside. And then there fell on his ears a muffled murmur of voices in the kitchen, and a faint noise like the falling of shoes upon the stone floor. Stealing across the room, he knelt before the door and listened with a sudden dread in his heart.

For a moment he heard nothing at all, then to his horror he caught the whisper of a voice he knew too well—the shrill, nasal accents of Mr. Macaulay, the schoolmaster, in close conversation with his aunt.

So near were they both to the door that he could hear every word they said.

"I tell you I saw him," said the schoolmaster.

"But what of that? Every one knows that old Castleleathers is safe as Mr. Hossack himself."

"Who cares two pins for Castleleathers—it is the other I want . . ."

"Ye mean the big man . . ."

"That I do. If I can lay hands on him I'll fling a net over more rebels than if we had Lovat himsel'."

"But Rob knows nothing of this. He's only a laddie gone daft over soldiers. He'll have forgotten all about it in the morning."

"Not he—but if he can tell me where one whose name I'll no breathe to you nor to any one else, can be found, I'll see his neck is safe."

"Then on wi' ye," whispered Miss Macpherson, "for I doubt we must save Rob if we can. Ye hae the rope."

"That have I," returned the master.

Then followed complete silence, and a second later the faint creaking of the door behind which he crouched. Rob sprang to his feet, and paused irresolutely. He was unarmed and helpless.

Very slowly the door began to open. He knew it by the draught of air upon his face. In the pitch darkness he leaned close to the wall waiting for them to pass him towards the bed.

But at that moment there sounded very faintly, like the sighing of the wind—the far-off catch of a tune—a little twisted coil of melody such as the fairies dance to.

"Hold!" whispered Macaulay, in a low tense voice.

"It is but a laddie's whistle," snapped Miss Macpherson, "haste ye."

But he appeared to have a dread of something in his mind.

"That is no boy's whistle," he replied sullenly, "but the pipe o' Muckle John."

Then Rob could have shouted for joy, for he knew in a trice who the great man in Fraser's tavern had been, who but the stranger on the moor who had lured the weasel from his lair. Nearer came the ripple of music, and then sounded a lusty banging at the street door and a man's voice shouting for entry.

"Whist!" said his aunt, and again came the knocking.

"Wha's there?" she cried.

"Open!" returned the voice—a deep bass voice like the noise of a bull. "Open in the name of the King!"

"Better open, Mistress Macpherson," counselled the master; "though I would I were out of here. If I had a sword, but who ever saw a dominie with such a thing?" and he laughed ruefully, while a furious knocking beat upon the door. Presently Rob saw the yellow ligh

of a candle, and heard the falling back of the bolts.

A cold burst of night air rushed into the place, and with it there entered a great, formidable looking man, so tall that he must needs bend nearly double to enter, dressed in riding clothes, and with his hat rammed down upon his face.

Rob slid into the room. Beside him stood Mr. Macaulay, the rope still dangling in his hands. His aunt was facing the stranger, holding the candle high so that its rays fell upon his face.

So they stood for a moment, and then the stranger closed the door behind him, swung off his hat, and made a sweeping bow.

"Madam," said he, "I crave your pardon for this seeming incivility; but I am new come to Inverness, and am quartered here until to-morrow."

(Not so new-come thought Rob, mindful of Fraser's tavern.)

All the time the strangers alert blue eyes were speeding hither and thither about the room. They paused for a moment on the rope in the master's hands, took in Rob at a glance (but with no appearance of recognition which grieved him), and then returned to Miss Macpherson, who had never acknowledged his presence by word or nod.

"Sir," said Rob to the stranger, "Mr. Macaulay was even now enquiring for you."

"Thank ye," he replied, "but I have already seen the rope in his hands. Maybe it could be used for a better purpose . . ."

Mr. Macaulay was as near to the door as the stranger. With a bound he reached it, and flung it back. And then with another swirl of air he was gone into the night.

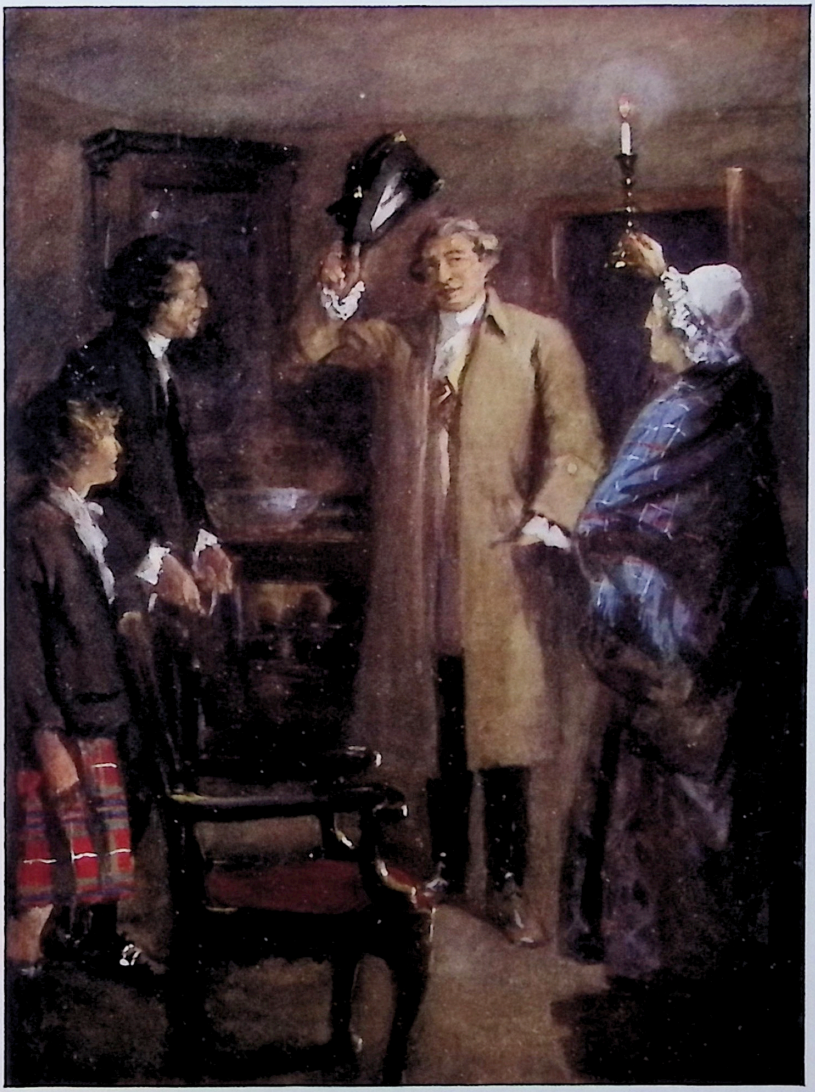
The stranger watched his departure with upraised brows and a smile upon his lips, then he stepped to the door and closed it, bolting it with careful hands.

"For the present," said he, turning to Rob, "he's gone: You are not afraid of my company, are you?"

He grasped him gently by each shoulder as he spoke, and looked into his eyes.

Rob shook his head. Afraid of the man of the moor! He was suddenly overtaken by a curious shyness of this mysterious man with his shrewd, inscrutable blue eyes, his great Highland nose, the whimsical twist that lurked at the corners of his mouth, and his massive head far up near the rafters through the vast height of him.

His clothes had a foreign cut, and he betrayed the inflection of a strange accent underlying his words accompanied by occasional gestures of the hands that strike a northerner as affected and womanly. His voice was very deep and soft and so persuasive that few could withstand him. Even in anger it was never harsh—but



"MADAM," SAID HE, "I CRAVE YOUR PARDON FOR THIS SEEMING INCIVILITY."

some said he never permitted himself to grow angry and for that very reason always won his own way. Even Miss Macpherson only angered him once.

Meanwhile the stranger was eyeing them both with droll intentness. If only the honest can meet another's gaze without flinching then he must have been a very honest man indeed, for there were few he could not stare down, and what is more take a relish in so doing.

"How are you named?" he asked, still grasping the boy by the shoulder.

"My name is Rob Fraser," he replied, "and this is my aunt, Miss Macpherson."

"Then I am in good company," he said, and letting go of Rob began to warm his hands at the fire, turning them backwards and forwards to the blaze. "It is good," he mused after a while, "to have peat reek in one's nostrils once again. What a bonny room this is. There are few pans like those in Inverness I'll warrant. I would like fine to taste a bannock of your cooking, Miss Macpherson. I know a good bannock when I see it, and it's long since I've had a taste of old Scotland . . . " at which he sighed and stared upon the ground.

Somewhat mollified, despite herself, Miss Macpherson set the table again, and busied herself amongst her household utensils. Over the peat fire a pot was swinging on a chain from a cross beam above. The place was full

of the rare smell of it. But the stranger said nothing, though he must have been cying out for a basinful. Instead he drew Rob to the fire, and spoke to him in his low musical voice, sitting upon a stool with his great coat hung up upon a peg beside him and the steam rising from it and losing itself in the blueness of the peat reek.

"I saw ye the day," he said. "It was just after our forces, heaven help them, had passed. I canna bear to look at them. I feel like a man watching a procession of bairns and dying men . . ."

"Have you been in another war?" asked Rob.

"War," said he, "this is not war. Man Rob, I've served all over Europe and seen the armies of Frederick advance like the thunder of surf on a western isle. I have seen service in Poland, Austria, and the Netherlands. I have fought under Saxe."

He paused and seemed to draw some pleasure from Rob's flushed face and eager eyes.

"Last year I lay before Tournay under a starlit sky while all around me breathed thousands of men who lay before many hours on the field of Fontenoy. That is war, Rob, not skirling up and down the country with a few hundred puir Hielan' bodies."

"But I am enlisting," he said, considerably chilled by such words.

The stranger sniffed over the pot most

audibly. The savour was more than a hungry man could tolerate.

"You would make a rare campaigner, Miss Macpherson," he said, "Rob is surely daft to think of losing such a stew for all the thrones of Europe."

"It is only an ordinary stew," she said, with a faint flush on her cheeks.

"It may be for you, Miss Macpherson—I'll no deny it—but as a man not strange to stews I'd call it by another name . . ." and he smacked his lips and drew in another draught of it with relish.

"Weel, weel," murmured Miss Macpherson, and taking off the lid she set a knife into a piece of meat and with a spoon she emptied the gravy upon a plate.

"Draw in your stool," she said, and laid the bannocks beside him. Then after a momentary hesitation she laid a round black bottle upon the table. "It is from Laggan way," she said.

"A bonny country," he replied, and without delay set to with the greatest zest.

Meanwhile Rob drew near the fire, and laid a peat or two upon the dying glow. He suddenly remembered how near he had been to falling the prey to his aunt's schemes, and yet to look at her face one would have said she suffered no disappointment or resentment. There was a strong vein of fatalism in Miss Macpherson.

When the stranger had finished eating he

pushed back his stool, and wiped his mouth very genteelly with a kerchief.

"And now, sir," said he, addressing Rob, "what is this talk of the wars?"

"Aye," re-echoed Miss Macpherson, brightening, "ye may well ask that, Mister . . ." she hesitated.

"No matter," he replied quickly, "my name will keep."

"I want to fight for the Prince," said Rob, sturdily; "I have this claymore." And he brought it from the corner where it lay.

One look was sufficient for the stranger.

"Ye are a hundred years too late, my man," he said, regarding the rusty sword with a critical eye.

"It is all I have," said Rob.

"And all ye are good for," retorted his aunt.

The stranger meanwhile sat with his chin resting on one hand, a frown upon his face. Of a sudden he stirred fretfully.

"What sort of talk is this?" he cried. "To-morrow or the next day will see us scattered like muir fowl; but we've had a run for our money, whereas, you, poor lad, will have a sair run for your life. Bide a wee—there will be other risings," at which he stopped, and won a smile from Miss Macpherson for his brave advice.

"Thank ye, sir," she said, cordially; "and

listen to the gentleman, Rob, for he speaks true words."

Rob was about to break in when the stranger motioned him to silence.

"Tak' your time," said he, "and choose your ain gait, for there's a kind of empty satisfaction in that at a time — and I will play a bit tune, if I may." At which he bowed to Miss Macpherson, and she bowed back, and that none so stiffly.

Then drawing the selfsame reed from his greatcoat pocket that Rob had heard two years before, he began to play, and the manner of his playing was like the singing of a mavis at twilight. He played tunes both Scottish and foreign, strange, melancholy snatches of music very haunting to hear, and then, quite suddenly, he broke into a Jacobite melody, and Rob sat with eyes glued upon him, while a great stillness crept over the place.

The fire had died down, and the room fallen into darkness when he ceased, and it was only to lay the pipe upon the table. For out of the silence came the most wonderful voice; and the strange gentleman, rising to his feet, was singing an old Highland lament as though his heart would break. Rob stole a look at his aunt, and saw her lip—that iron, resolute lip—was trembling. Even the stranger's voice broke through the utter sadness of it all, at which he coughed and smiled, and then before Rob

could raise his eyes (it seemed to him to have no beginning at all, so quickly was it done) the stranger was upon his feet, and even while Miss Macpherson was secretively concealing a tear he had snatched up his whistle and was in the very middle of a Highland reel. With his fingers rippling up and down the holes of the thing, and the rakish tilt of his head, and the manner in which he kept time with his feet, and his shoulders and his whole body—with all of this and the dancing firelight and the wind shut out upon the street—the thing was like the work of a bogie. Had he been a little man with silver buttons and silver-buckle shoes and a velvet jacket, then there is no saying but that he might have played himself up the chimney and over the heather, with Rob and Miss Macpherson at his coat-tails.

The music grew faster. It grew wilder. It brought Rob to his feet and sent him skipping and snapping his fingers in a frenzy. The stranger was here and there, missing notes because he could not do everything at once, and turn at the same time. And then just when the rant was at its height Miss Macpherson was at it too, first skirts held daintily from the ground, then arms akimbo, bowing, twirling, spinning. The stranger threw aside his pipe. He sang the lilt of it instead, and so facing Miss Macpherson they capered and linked arms and clapped their hands and hooched until the

stools were jumping all over the floor and the bannocks after them, and the table rocked upon its legs in the corner.

"Well, my lad," panted the gentleman after it was over, wiping his face, "have ye settled the matter?"

"Sir," cried Rob, "it's the Prince for me."

"Well, well," said he, seating himself again, as though he had guessed as much.

"I believe ye sang so on purpose," snapped Mistress Macpherson, now thoroughly awakened to the danger, and considerably ashamed of herself.

"On my oath, madam," he replied, "I advised the lad against it—ye heard me with your ain ears."

"But thae songs?"

"Tuts," he said, "what are songs?"

The dawn was already in the east, and a faint grey light shone beneath the door.

With a start, the stranger rose to his feet.

"The day is near," he said, sombrely, "I must be stepping"; and for a breath or two he looked Rob in the eyes.

"And I, too, if I may go with you," said Rob, casting a glance at his aunt.

For a moment she struggled with her anger, then, taking him roughly by the shoulder, she shook him.

"Go then," she cried, "but dinna say it

was with my leave. And you, sir, do what you can for him."

"Madam," said the stranger, wrapping his greatcoat about him, "I promise you that."

"What name do ye go by?" asked Mistress Macpherson, of a sudden.

He appeared for an instant slightly put about.

"The name I go by," repeated he, "is Muckle John."

"That's no sort of name," she snapped.

"It's sufficient for me," he replied, and touching Rob on the shoulder, they passed into the street.

From far away came the shrill notes of many bagpipes, and the faint stirring of assembling men.

"Rob," said Muckle John, slyly, "I thought you had forgotten."

"I knew you at once," said Rob, "but you never looked at me."

"Did I no," said Muckle John, "maybe there were reasons, Rob—there are folk would do the world for a friend of mine, but there are others, Rob—there are others."

CHAPTER III

THE END OF THE JACOBITE CAUSE

THE position of Prince Charlie in Inverness was exceedingly critical. To the north lay the forces of Lord Loudon. To the east and south were the Hanoverian army commanded by the Duke of Cumberland now stationed at Aberdeen. But his position was rendered even more precarious by lack of foresight in ignoring the advice of Lord George Murray, and refusing to provide a supply of provision in the Highlands.

Judging that the Duke would not advance for some weeks, the Prince decided on the reduction of various forts and positions held by the enemy, and above all the destruction of Lord Loudon's army.

It was arranged, therefore, that Lord Cromartie (one of those incompetent officers who handicapped the Jacobite cause) should advance upon Lord Loudon in order that the menace from the north might be destroyed, and this, he prepared to do, accompanied by the Mackenzies, the Mackintoshes, Macgregors and others.

The preparations for this expedition were under discussion when Muckle John and Rob came into the main street. For a while they

walked along in silence, Muckle John grown suddenly gravely absorbed, and taking such great strides that Rob was hard put to it to keep up. The dawn was come, and with it the town of Inverness began to hum and buzz like a hive of bees. Men, quartered in every house along the narrow street, commenced to pour out upon the highway, some putting on their sword-belts as they came, others wiping sleep out of their tired eyes with their knuckled hands.

It was the sight of their claymores that sent Muckle John's flickering eyes upon his companion.

"My lad," said he, stopping abruptly, "there's one thing we must be seeing too. For cutting firewood or driving bestial,* I have no doubt yon weapon might serve as well as another, but for the game of war it is disappointing," and whipping out his own sword he made a parry or two, and winked at him.

"What do ye think o' that?" said he, and drove it home again into the scabbard.

"I think it's bonny," said Rob shivering with the chill wind.

"Bonny—you Fraser loon—what kind of word is that for the sword of Muckle John," and without a word, he turned his back and began to stride again up the street, snorting as he went.

* Cattle.

"But, sir," cried Rob, at his heels, "what about me?"

"You," cried Muckle John in a huff, "what indeed?"

"I know nothing of swords," said Rob, anxious to appease him at all costs.

Presently Muckle John stopped and looked, first upon the ground and then at Rob, and so upon the ground again.

"Rob," said he at last, "had ye no better take your ways home?"

"Never!" cried he.

Without a word the other turned upon his heel, again, and so in a dour silence they reached the centre of the town.

"Rob," said Muckle John, "you see that house there? That is where the Prince is staying, and there at the door he is, and with him Lord George Murray, a braw soldier but no Irish, and so not above suspicion."

On the door-step stood Prince Charlie talking in a vexed, irritated manner to a very choleric-looking gentleman, who seemed in a bubble of anger, which he could ill control.

"Come ye with me, Rob," said Muckle John, "and keep your eyes open, and your mouth as tight as a gravestone."

As they approached, the Prince let his eyes rest on the massive figure of Muckle John, then nodded absently like a man whose thoughts are far away. Lord George Murray,

on the other hand, greeted him with some cordiality, and turning again to the Prince, continued his conversation.

"I can assure your Highness that no aid will come from France," he said, "Fitzjames is captured, and that is not the last of it. . . ."

The Prince gnawed his lip with bitter vexation.

"Your lordship was always most certain in disaster," he said peevishly, "a long face carries a long tale."

"Unless we drive back Loudon we are like rats in a trap," went on Murray ignoring the words.

"You forget Prestonpans, my lord."

The other shook his head fretfully.

"The men are tired and wearied of it all," he replied, "they want to go home—they are not regular soldiers. . . ."

"What would you say to talk like this?" said the Prince, turning of a sudden upon Muckle John.

"Sir," he answered, "your troops are exhausted. But in the mountains you could resist the enemy until they recovered their strength."

"But there is no money—no sign of men nor arms. What of France—what of the English Jacobites?"

"What indeed?" said a low voice from the doorway.

Looking down upon them all stood a young

man of about thirty—a thin, slight, anxious-looking man dressed in black, carefully tended clothes. It was Mr. Secretary Murray, or, to give him his full name, John Murray of Broughton.

"May the English Jacobites not escape their just punishment," he said gravely, "should disaster await us," and he sighed and stared out across the street.

"Shall I go north to assist Lord Cromartie?" asked Lord George Murray, who hated Broughton.

The Prince frowned as though he would like to know the inner purpose for such a plan. Then, seeing none but that of reason and loyal service, and yet doubting the latter very sincerely, he replied almost gruffly:

"We will see what Sir Thomas Sheridan has to advise," whereat the countenance of Lord George Murray grew dark with strangled rage. For a man who had risked his life and fortune and the lives of his people to be dependent upon the whim of an Irish adventurer with nothing to lose and everything to gain was enough to ruin any cause. Already the end of the '45 was in sight.

Muckle John bowed and drew Rob away. A few minutes later Lord George Murray passed them with a face like murder, bound for the North.

"Maybe ye see now," said Muckle John, "how the wind blows. There goes as good a

soldier as can be, but ye'll find that whatever he advises will be contradicted by any poor Irish creature or Frenchman who may be passing. The longer Cumberland sits snug in Aberdeen the more time will there be for hectoring and desertion and the beginning of the end. Wae's me," he sighed, "I would give something to be upon the quay of Dunkirk, for there's nothing here for the likes o' me but a rope with a bit noose."

The business of procuring arms for Rob was next undertaken, and it was a proud day indeed when he strapped a targe on his back, and a claymore to his side. He was attached to Lord George Murray's flying column in pursuit of Lord Loudon, and so on the evening of that day he bade farewell to Muckle John.

The march north was uneventful, and in due course, with only a victorious expedition to his credit, Rob returned with the Duke of Perth to Inverness and was dispatched into Atholl with Lord George Murray's force.

During the succeeding weeks, the guerilla engagements of the detachments in Atholl and Lochaber were completely successful, while in the east the Prince kept at bay the dragoons of General Bland. It is not fully appreciated that the campaign around Inverness was no less brilliant and successful than the other engagements of the Jacobite rebellion.

But the war was nearing a crisis. Cumber-

land having waited for the spring, moved out of Aberdeen on April 8, his force consisting of six battalions of foot and a regiment of dragoons. At Strathbogie, General Bland, with six battalions, Kingston's Horse and Cobham's Dragoons, awaited his advance, while at Old Meldrum were three battalions under Brigadier Mordaunt. In this manner the entire army advanced on Inverness.

The swiftness of their approach was wellnigh fatal to the Prince. His troops were scattered on foraging and isolated expeditions, while Lord Cromartie was as far away as Sutherlandshire. Many clansmen had returned home while a great number were wandering the country-side in search of food.

On the morning of April 14 the drums began to beat and the pipes to sound through the streets of Inverness, and with Charles Edward at their head the Highlanders marched out of the town towards Culloden. On the 15th the Prince brought his army to Drummossie-Moor, with a view to engaging the enemy there. But the ground was flat and heathy and unsuitable for the method of attack most favoured by the Highlanders. Lord George Murray pleaded for more rugged and boggy country to disconcert the English cavalry, but Charles, tired of long waiting, was obdurate. It was decided that a night attack was under the circumstances the wisest plan of action. To

attack the enemy crippled in artillery and cavalry work was on the surface a wise course, and accordingly about eight o'clock on that evening, Rob heard the order to prepare to march. It was with heavy steps that the Highlanders formed up, for only one biscuit per man had been served out that day and they were utterly exhausted for want of food. Moreover it was regarded as unwise to attack without the Mackenzies, the Frasers, the Macphersons, the Macgregors and Glengarry's men, all of whom were supposed to be hastening to Inverness.

However, the prospect of a night attack was sufficient to send them along with good heart, and so the twelve-mile march began, and all through the black night tramped the silent army, stumbling, falling, straying from the road, until the dawn gleamed faintly in the east and they realized that the plan had failed. To meditate attack under such circumstances was to court utter disaster. There was nothing for it but to return. The surprise had failed. The Prince, white and tired, seemed on the point of tears. All around him were haggard faces and lagging feet. Hardly a word was spoken. It was in sober truth the retreat of a beaten army. . . .

The clansmen, now utterly exhausted, strayed back to Inverness in search of food. Many dropped in deep slumber upon the ground. In Culloden House the Prince sat in the deepest

dejection. Not long after news reached him that the English forces were advancing. Once again the clans were gathered—messages were sent to Inverness to hasten the stragglers—everything was done to put as brave a face on it as possible. Lord George Murray again advised taking up a position more suited for the Highland charge, or retreating into the hills. But the Prince again rejected his counsel, and instead of seven thousand fresh troops only about five thousand exhausted men assembled on level country to meet Cumberland's veteran force.

To Rob, who looked on the Highland claymore as irresistible, the approaching conflict was none too soon, to others it came as a relief after weeks of waiting and hardship.

Of that ill-omened day everything is known, and little need be said: it was the inevitable conclusion of a forlorn hope.

The English opened fire, and for long enough bullets rained and sang through the sullen Highland ranks. At last Lord George Murray resolved on an advance, but before he could give the order the Mackintoshes, with the heroism that had ever distinguished that clan, charged recklessly, and at that all the regiments on the right moved forward, and the action began in earnest.

An aide-de-camp was dispatched to hurry the advance of the left wing, but he was shot

on the way and this unhappy accident prevented the Highland advance concentrating its full shock. It has long been an established belief that the battle was lost largely owing to the defection of the Macdonalds, who refused to advance on a dispute of precedence. It is time that a story without historical foundation should be for ever discredited. The Macdonalds did not receive the command to charge until it was too late, and they found themselves faced by an impassable morass when they moved forward. When the battle was lost and the Prince in flight, they marched from the stricken moor in good order.

The English soldiery meanwhile had awaited the attack with levelled muskets and fixed bayonets, reserving their fire until the Highlanders were almost upon them. At close quarters they raked the close ranks of the clansmen with deadly aim.

The carnage was terrible. Whole ranks of the Highlanders were swept away. But it took more than that to stem that mad and dauntless charge. It broke through Barrel's and Monro's regiments, but farther they could not go, for they received a storm of grapeshot sufficient to decimate their numbers. Had the whole Highland line delivered its shock simultaneously the English army might have recoiled and taken to flight. But the failure of the extreme left to advance at all lessened the frail

chance of such a tactic proving decisive, and within a few minutes the Jacobite cause was lost.

Rob, placed on the left wing, weary of waiting and sick at heart by the sight of men falling all about him, unloosed his claymore, and pulling his bonnet down upon his brows, prepared for his regiment to charge. At last they could stand the shattering fire no longer. With a hoarse noise of shouting rising from Gaelic tongues like the roar of a winter sea, they streamed forward in reckless bravery, and foremost of them Rob, running over the heavy ground towards the storm and thunder of the conflict.

Already, however, the main body of the Highlanders was wavering. The first wild charge had shattered their ranks. The English cavalry were advancing and some one shouted that the Prince was killed. Panic began to do its work. Soon after the left wing commenced to march off the field.

All about Rob arose hoarse cries, groans, eddying smoke, and the roar and clatter of arms. Into the thick of the conflict he struggled onwards. He thrust and parried and thrust again with his claymore. Well for him was it that his father had taught him the secrets of a stiff wrist and the upper cut. An English soldier rushed at him red with battle madness, and shouting as he came. Rob, receiving a blow from an upraised musket on his targe,

drove home his claymore and heard the cry die out in the man's throat into a choking sob, and—silence.

Then, before he could disengage his sword, a dragoon, spurring his horse over the heaps of fallen men, slashed at his head with his sabre, and, missing him, pulled up his beast and charged again. For Rob the situation was desperate, but seeing a little solitary group of Highlanders near by, he took to his heels and reached them, picking up an English musket as he ran. He was barely in time; had not a huge Cameron armed with a broadsword hewn down his opponent, it would have fared badly indeed with him. As it was, he clubbed his musket, and standing back to back with the others, prepared to fall as hardly as possible.

The tide of battle swept backwards and forwards; but all over the fatal moor the Jacobite army was in retreat. Gradually the little group about him thinned, until only a bare dozen remained, and it was in a breathing-space that Rob suddenly perceived Muckle John amongst them.

His head was bound in a piece of tartan, and bleeding profusely; but the smile was in his eyes, and his claymore rose and fell, and every time a man floundered upon the ground. Before him there lay a heap of Englishmen as high as his elbow.

Presently the smoke of powder cleared a little, and over the moor came a squadron of dragoons at a loose canter, killing all who stood in their way, both wounded and unarmed. Round the little circle of faces Muckle John looked swiftly.

"Now," said he, "it is each for himself," and he whistled a sprig of a tune as he began to swing his sword-arm.

With a hoarse yell the dragoons were on them. Two fell to Muckle John, there was a wild clash, and a man beside Rob dropped with a groan. And then came an oppressive weight of horses kicking, plunging, rearing—and a blinding blow flung him unconscious beneath their flying feet.

It was well indeed for Rob that death seemed to have snatched him from the cruel hands of his enemies, and the pile of dead and dying about him sheltered his body from the search parties of Hanoverians now busy upon their work of butchery.

When at last he opened his eyes and stared about him silence had fallen over the field—a silence infinitely tragic and menacing, pent up with disaster and following retribution.

Very slowly facts began to stare him in the face. Even he, inexperienced in the manners of war and defeat as he was, realized with a shudder that if he could not crawl away certain death

awaited him as it had met those silent figures all about him. The blow on his head throbbed horribly. He felt sick and weak. At last he made an effort to turn upon his side, and moaned aloud. Then suddenly he clenched his lips, and dropped upon his face, for near at hand he caught the tramp of footsteps, and heard the harsh voices of English soldiery.

Nearer they came, until they halted beside him.

"None for Master Gibbet 'ere," said one, and a chuckle followed.

"You never know," said another, and began dragging the bodies this way and that.

A muffled groan came from one of these unfortunates, and a moment later, to Rob's horror, a pistol barked, and the same grim silence fell again.

Then a hand gripped him by the arm, and turned him over. To feign death—that old, hazardous device—was Rob's solitary hope. He lay with closed eyes, holding his breath, in an agony of suspense. Second followed second, and no sound reached him. Stealthy footsteps he heard, and a muffled laugh, but nothing to warn him of immediate impending danger. So awful became the mysterious nature of the delay that he could hold out no longer. Breathe he must, or he would burst his lungs.

He drew in a long draught of air through

his nostrils, and in a flash—before he knew what had happened, he had sneezed. A roar of brutal laughter greeted the penetrating noise, and a voice cried out beside him:

"Two to one on the snuff, Jerry; I've won the wager," and he was dragged to his feet.

Rob opened his eyes now that the worst was come. He would meet his end as bravely as he could. Four English soldiers were seated upon a pile of dead Highlanders, and another held him by the arm. He saw that there was little chance of mercy written on their brutal faces. Memories of Prestonpans and Falkirk were too sore for that.

"Well, my gamecock," said the man who held him, "so you are not so dead after all. What shall it be? A little bullet from a pistol, or a dig with one of your own claymores—more homelike that, eh?"

Rob kept silence. He could not understand a word they said in their queer, nasal twang. Vainly his eyes searched the desolate, wind-swept moor. The clash of battle was long since past. No hope of friendly succour lay there.

"Haste ye!" cried one of the four men who sat together. "There is other work. Pistol him and be done with it."

At that the fellow who held Rob stepped back a pace, and drawing his pistol, raised it

and fired deliberately at him. Had Rob not ducked it would have killed him as he stood.

"A miss!" cried the others, and with an exclamation the man snatched a loaded pistol from one of his comrades, and prepared to finish the business.

Rob stood very still this time. He was too weak to run. The sooner it was all over the better.

The man was poising the pistol in his hand; he had shut one eye, and was glaring at Rob with the other. Already the trigger was moving, when a stern voice shouted "Halt!" and an English officer, very resplendently dressed, and with a white peruke, snatched the pistol from the man's hand. The other four staggered to their feet, and stood at attention.

The officer, whose back was turned on Rob, appeared to stare for a moment at the soldiers. Then, throwing the pistol upon the ground, he folded his arms and began to speak with a strong English accent, as baffling to Rob as that of his captors.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "Would you shoot a wounded boy?"

"Our orders were no quarter," growled the man who had so nearly killed Rob.

"Take your orders from me," thundered the officer in a blaze of anger, "or there will be more gibbets in Inverness than you had reckoned upon, and with fine, red-coated gentry upon them belike," at which Rob saw the

fellows stir uneasily, and cast apprehensive glances at one another.

Apparently satisfied by the fear he had put upon them, the officer pointed to a horse wandering aimlessly about the moor, his reins about his knees.

"Fetch that horse," said he; "my beast was shot from under me an hour since."

Two of the men darted off, only too glad to win his favour, and all the time the officer stood with his back to Rob—a great, square figure, with a broad tear across the middle of his doublet and the long hair showing beneath his peruke. The soldiers caught the horse without difficulty, and returned with it. It was a dragoon charger, a great grey, raking beast, strong and sound.

Taking the reins in his hands, the officer turned again to the men.

"Mayhap you cannot guess whom you so nearly shot," said he darkly.

They shook their heads in an awed silence.

"Then ask in Inverness," he replied, and vaulted into the saddle.

"Now," he went on, "hand that boy up here. He's no prisoner for such as you."

In a moment, two of the soldiers caught up Rob and placed him in front of the saddle, so that he sat upon the horse's withers.

Then gathering up the reins they walked slowly away, leaving the soldiers at the salute.

A hundred yards passed and still they maintained this idle pace. Then suddenly the officer leaned forward.

"Haud tight," he whispered into Rob's ears in a voice strangely familiar, "for we're no through with it yet," and with a plunge the great horse sprang into a gallop.

"Muckle John!" cried Rob, nearly falling off altogether.

"Aye," said he, "just Muckle John and no sae happy at that.

Onward they rode at a headlong, tearing gallop, until the ill-fated field of Culloden with its heaps of huddled dead lay far behind them; and passing the water of Nairn, made for Aberarder and clattering through, thundered onward to Faraline.

CHAPTER IV

FRENCH GOLD

A THIN moon was drifting above the scattered clouds when Muckle John and Rob reached the head of a wild and desolate glen in Strather-rick, and here for the first time since their flight from Culloden they drew rein and alighted. So stiff and weary was Rob that his companion was compelled to lift him down, and lay him in the heather.

The horse, utterly done, stood with his head hanging forlornly, and the sweat dripping from his neck upon the heather. Few horses would have carried them both so gallantly.

Muckle John had long since discarded his English wig and coat. He stood in his shirt and with his hair fluttering in the night wind regarding with sombre eyes the blinking lights of a house down the valley, a square white house two stories high. Twice during the brief halt a man had crept out of the encircling darkness and scrutinized them narrowly. There was no sound beyond the wind sighing amongst the corries, but each time Muckle John had seen the heather quiver before something noiseless and stealthy that disappeared as softly as it had

come. Once from far up the hill he heard a long whistle like a curlew on the wing.

At last he turned his head and let his eyes rest on Rob, and then again upon the grey horse with its drooping head. With a faint shrug of his shoulders he shook the boy.

"Rob," said he, "do you ken yon house?"

With a groan Rob struggled up.

"Gortuleg House," he replied, "I know it well."

Muckle John of a sudden turned his head and raised his hand for silence.

From far away along the track they had come was a sharp click-clack like the rattle of a loose stone on a horse's hoof.

"Ye hear, Rob," he whispered, "there'll be few abed to-night. Come away, boy, this is a daft-like place to be found in."

From up the hill came the mournful whistle once again. It was answered by another far down the glen.

"The place is hotching with Frasers," he muttered, lifting Rob upon the horse, "and where the Frasers are a man must feel his way, saving your presence, Rob."

"They are our friends," said Rob stoutly, "and my people."

"I'm no denying it—though maybe ye had safer speak for yersel', Rob, but to-day will end many a friendship, and I'm no trusting Lochiel himsel' until I'm clear of this business."

Nearer they drew to the lights of Gortuleg

House, but the closer they came the more cautious grew Muckle John, feeling his way with immoderate care, and with a hand upon the horse's nostrils for fear of a whinny. To the rear of the house there stood a wall with a few stunted fruit-trees in an orchard. In the same anxious silence Muckle John hitched the bridle to a branch and lifted Rob down.

"Bide here," he whispered, "until I come, and if any one speaks to you say that you're waiting upon Lord Lovat."

"Lord Lovat?"

"Who else?"

"But is he here?"

"Man Rob, I've no time to teach you elements of common sense. If ye see a wheen corbies driving across the sky what do ye ken?"

"That there's carrion," said Rob to humour his temper.

"And if ye see muckle muir-fowl cowering among the heather?"

"A hawk."

"You're doing finely, Rob;" he paused and leaning nearer added in a whisper, "I am no sure but that the hawk is nearer than ye think . . ." and with that he was gone, leaving Rob beneath the shadow of the broken masonry.

Barely five minutes had passed before the thud of horses' flying feet came beating down the glen. The moon riding high in the sky

glinted on steel and silver, and at the commotion the door of Gortuleg House opened and the figure of an old bent man was silhouetted in the doorway, leaning upon a stick. He was a grotesque enough spectacle—very ponderous and unwieldy, large-faced and ruddy and with shifty, speeding eyes almost buried in a mass of flesh. He was dressed in a loose coat, rough baggy breeches and stockings, with large flat buckled shoes, and as he peered and craned his head he tapped in a fever of impatience upon the flagged stone at the doorway.

A single ray of light made a yellow bar upon the open space in front.

Nearer and nearer came the racket of galloping horses—the jingling of bits and scabbards—the hoarse shout of a man's voice, and into the lit space plunged a powerful roan horse all dirty grey with foam and spent mud. Upon its back there sat a young man rocking with fatigue and with his head uncovered and his coat opened to the night wind. The old man standing in the doorway shuffled forward a step and laid a hand upon his bridle-reins.

"Who are ye?" he asked in a shrill querulous voice, "and what news do you bring?"

For a long time there was no reply, and in the silence the candle in the old man's hand fluttered desperately and went out.

"I am the Prince," said the man upon the horse in a dull voice as though he were half

dreaming, "I am the Prince and . . ." his voice trailed into silence.

Round him in a half-circle the companions of that wild flight were gathered—their faces looking very dim and white like the faces of ghosts. For an instant the old man seemed to shrink into himself. His great head drooped, —the hand that gripped the bridle fell with a low thud against his side. But only for an instant. There was within that disease-racked body an energy that defied the penalties of age.

"Dhia gleidh sinn," he cried harshly, "are you tongueless all of you? Come—come in—would you sit glooming there all night? Your Highness," he said, breaking off and looking up again, "this is a wae meeting and like to be our last. . . ."

"You are Lord Lovat," said the Prince with more life in his voice.

"It is a name," the old man replied, with a sudden twisted grin, "that I would I could disown."

A few gillies had gathered about the horsemen, and when they had dismounted their tired beasts were led away to an outhouse, and the whole party followed Lord Lovat within.

Inside the room where they made their way a great fire was burning. A table stood in the centre, upon which was a bottle of claret and some glasses. He had waited news for hours back.

In the firelight Lord Lovat regarded his visitors with sour displeasure. Now that the news of Culloden had come, and the first biting terror over, he resumed his habitual demeanour of inscrutable cynicism. He congratulated the Prince on arriving so soon, and poured out his glass of wine—he asked the names of the various gentlemen with him and expressed polite ignorance when he was informed, only remarking that he had always admired Irishmen because they took so much interest in other people's affairs. And all the time he was cursing his utter folly for having supported the Jacobite cause and plotting, plotting, plotting in his inmost mind what was the safest course to take.

Only once did his self-possession desert him, and that was when the Prince said to Sir Thomas Sheridan that they must make for the Isles.

"Make for the Isles," he cried, glaring at them like an aged wolf-hound, "what sort of talk is that? Will you desert us all and not make a stand in the hills? What is one defeat? You must make terms, sir, or you'll have more to answer for than ever your father had."

"It is no good," replied the Prince dejectedly.

"Oh, why," cried Lovat, trembling with fury and vexation, "did ye come and ruin us at all?"

At that they tried to soothe him, telling

him that he had taken no part—that he was an old man—that he could hide for a season. To all of which Lovat shook his great head. He never deceived himself.

"More than that," went on the Irishman, Sheridan, pacing up and down before the open window, "all is not lost. The clans will assemble again, and French gold is even now on its way. Gold," he added, "will unite us again as quick as honour."

He smiled, little guessing how far he erred in that while Lovat listened absently.

"French gold," he repeated, "and how can they land gold now?"

"They make for Lochnanuagh," replied Sheridan, "and. . . ." but the Prince broke in:

"Come, gentlemen," he cried, "let us to horse. We must reach Invergarry before dawn. There is no sleep for us yet awhile . . ." and he raised his harassed eyes to the cold sky. "My lord," he said, a moment later, taking Lovat by the hand, "do not give way to despair—we are not beaten yet."

But the melancholy tone in which he sought to cheer the old man went like a chill to their hearts, and brought the old satirical grin to Lovat's mouth.

"Farewell," replied the old man with all the natural dignity that neither age nor dishonour could rob him, "I doubt we shall never meet again."

At that they all rose, and after shaking him by the hand passed down the stairs. He accompanied them to the door and stood with no further word while they mounted their beasts. The gillies letting the reins, fell back into the night leaving him alone. He took off his hat, but made no other sign.

Of a sudden in the cold night there rang a wild tumult of horses' hoofs and they were gone as they had come.

For long Lord Lovat stood in the doorway listening, with his eyes upon the black way they had taken, and then shivering violently he turned and stumbled upstairs.

Out in the darkness Muckle John crept from the shadows. He had heard all or nearly all. He looked all around him and then stared at the upper window of Gortuleg. He could see the vast shadow of Lovat seated by the table waiting his fate. For a few minutes he stood pondering the situation, then on tiptoe he crossed the track and opened the door. Closing it gently, he made his way up the narrow stairs. The door to the room where Lovat sat was open. He halted in the passage and looked in.

On a chair before the empty fire-grate sat the old man, his eyes fixed upon the floor, his legs crossed his fingers intertwined. His lips were moving ceaselessly, and once he frowned like a man frowns to himself who is uncertain just what course to take.

At last he rose and made his way across the room and to a strong box heavily clasped. This he unlocked and opened, extracting a heap of documents and letters and laying them upon the table. Then setting fire to the peats, he began to turn over the stuff, throwing some into the flames and putting some back again into the box.

"A braw night to you," said Muckle John, standing full in the doorway. The paper the old man held between his fingers fluttered gently upon the floor. Over his face there travelled a grey tinge as though he had grown of a sudden very old or ill. But he never moved nor did he say anything.

Entering the room, Muckle John closed the door, and walking towards the fire set about warming his hands in the coolest manner imaginable. Then taking off his great coat he laid it over the window.

"On such a night," he said, "it is better to do things quickly, my lord, and privately."

The old man answered nothing. He seemed struck dumb with fear, or rage, or some kindred emotion.

"I take it from your little preparations that you know how things stand."

"I was looking through some old rubbish," said Lovat more at his ease.

"I know what sort of rubbish," replied Muckle John, extracting a letter before the old man could check his hand, "how would this sound,

eh? It's no what we might call cordial to Geordie."

"I am an old sick man," said Lovat, with a suspicion of whining, "scarce able to read or write. My memory is near gone and my faculties all amiss. What do you want with me? It is late and I have much to do."

"Perhaps your lordship will remember Castleleathers, who was once your good friend."

"What of him?"

"He did me a service abroad. Yesterday I was with him in Inverness. He told me much about you, my lord—and your promises."

Lovat shrugged his shoulders.

"It is easy to listen to one side of a matter," he replied tartly. "Castleleathers is a fool—I have never suffered fools gladly."

"Even you make mistakes sometimes, my lord."

The fear of capture took Lovat by the throat.

"Aye," he gulped, "but this is no time to quarrel. Let bygones be bygones. I did ye a wrong long since, I'll allow, but surely ye can forgive and forget?"

"No," said Muckle John, "I never forgive nor forget."

"Then what is it you want—is it my life—there is little enough of that to take—or is it money—I have a few guineas?"

"It is none of these. If I wanted your life I would set the red coats on you. But

they will need no guidance of mine. I want to know where the gold is to be landed that is coming from France."

"Oho," cried Lovat, "so that's how the wind blows, is it?" and he remained deep in thought for a while.

"Will you do something if I tell ye?" he asked cunningly.

"Maybe and maybe no."

Lovat moistened his dry lips.

"There are sore times coming," he said in his husky voice, and speaking in Gaelic for the first time, "and I am not what I was. There may be folk who will swear black is black instead of white—you will be taking my meaning? Were I to fall into the hands of the Government it might go badly with me. But there are ways. . . ."

"And they?"

"I have not taken arms, though my son has. They would never harm him being a mere boy, but they might forgive his old father should he hand him over. It must happen one way or the other. But I cannot lay hands on him. What would you say to that? It is for the boy's good—"

"Impossible—you are pleased to insult me."

"Then what will you do should I tell you?"

"I will not dispatch these letters to the Duke of Newcastle."

A sickly grey colour crept into Lovat's cheeks.

"You would—you would?" he gasped. "You would play into English hands, you would sell me?"

"There was an occasion," said Muckle John, coolly, "when you nearly did the same to me."

"Long ago—long ago."

"In the year 1728 to be exact."

Lovat's eyes flickered over the strong box and back again.

"How did ye know there was treasure?" he said, to make time.

"You forgot to shut your window."

"You played eavesdropper?"

Muckle John sighed.

"The hour is late," he replied, meaningly.

"I am in your hands," said Lovat.

"Then tell me where the gold is to be landed. I could not catch the name of the place."

The old man leant forward suddenly.

"It is on the coast of Knoidart," he replied.

"You swear it?"

"Such were the words that Sheridan said."

"It sounded unlike Knoidart, but I could not hear."

"It was Knoidart."

For long Muckle John tried to read truth or lies in his face. But the expression of Lovat was guileless.

"If you have lied," said Muckle John at last, "I will hound you down."

Lovat gently drew the palms of his hands together.

"Why should I lie?" he said.

"Then good-bye, my lord, and look to your papers, for to-morrow will bring dragoons and . . ."

"Enough," broke in Lovat, "I am not afraid."

He sat perfectly still until Muckle John had gone down the stairs, then with a grim smile he set about sorting his papers.

"Knoidart," he chuckled, "it's little gold would remain in Knoidart."

Out in the night Muckle John stood deep in thought, then climbing softly over the wall he reached Rob and the great grey horse.

"I must leave you for a while, Rob," he whispered, "but I'll return, never fear, and keep watch for the bit tune—ye mind the way it goes—" and he whistled a bar. "Keep on the top of the hills, laddie, but mind the sky-line, and never stir by day. It's advice easily given but a weary business to follow," and putting his foot in the stirrup he mounted and walked softly down the glen.

A great loneliness stole over Rob, left as he was in a country he hardly knew, and with a throbbing wound, and a keen hunger on him. Stealing round to the house he made his way to the hall, and hearing no sound of human souls anywhere he entered the kitchen and happened upon a plate of cold porridge. This

he devoured, and re-entering the hall he lay down before the fire and fell asleep.

Upstairs Lovat crouched before the fire. Hour after hour passed and still he spelt out with his tired weak eyes the contents of one sheet upon another. Once he nodded and a letter passed unread—a letter that was to weigh in the scales against him later. For an hour he slept altogether. But as the dawn was creeping back over that stricken country, the day following Culloden found him still bending with a haggard countenance over his correspondence, every letter of which might bring him to the scaffold.

At dawn on the same morning that saw the Prince speeding westward and Muckle John upon the road, before the moon had sunk behind the hills, Rob Fraser stole out of the hall and made his way into the open air. Already rumours were drifting through the village that the English were on the march towards Gortuleg, and all who were suspected of having taken arms for the Prince would be summarily dealt with, and their houses given to the flames.

Round the premises of Gortuleg dwelt the same melancholy silence as on the night before. Every living thing seemed to have fled. The very kennels were empty. Only one shaggy Highland pony whinnied in the desolate stable, hungry and alone.

A grey mist was driving down the glen, and a thin drizzle of rain had set in with the coming day.

As Rob peered up at the windows wondering what had befallen, he caught for an instant a pair of eyes fixed upon him, and heard a noise of shuffling feet. Coming from that deserted place it sounded so dreary that he was near taking to his heels. Before he could move, however, the huge bulk of Lord Lovat loomed into the shadowy doorway. Leaning heavily upon his stick with hunched shoulders, and a face unshaved and the grey colour of chalk, he stood with muttering lips. Then shuffling forward a step he stared blankly at Rob like a man whose thoughts are far away on another errand.

"What o'clock is it?" he rasped at last; and pulling off his wig, patted it idly, and rammed it again upon his head.

"Six o'clock, your lordship," said Rob, in a great awe of him.

"Six o'clock!" He frowned suddenly, looking all around him with pursed lips. "Where are my servants?" he cried. And when no answer came he quoted a scrap of Latin, and chuckled as though the context tickled him.

"Well, well," said he at last, "and who are you, boy?"

"Rob Fraser, sir."

"Thank ye," he snarled, speaking in broad

Scots; "but it's a name as common as muir-fowl hereabouts. Why are ye no with the Master, that unscrupulous rebel, my son? Mind how I spoke of him, Rob, should they ever dare to take me."

"I heard ye, my lord."

"Aye, and speak up for an old man, Rob, whose havers may be misinterpreted, ye ken. What is it ye will answer, Rob?"

"That you called your son, the Master, an unscrupulous rebel," he replied.

Lovat nodded his great head approvingly.

"Bonny it sounds. That'll make the House o' Peers sit up. We'll carry it with silver hairs and injured innocence, Rob—an auld man, my lords, near doited with years and sorrow."

He paused, and the look of fear twisted his features once again.

"It would look better to bide here," said he, in a mutter to himself, and so, with a pinch of snuff, he turned towards the door again. But a moment later he was back, and this time his limbs fairly shook with fear.

"No, no!" he gasped, one gout swollen hand upon his breast. "I canna wait here like an auld maimed dog. There are places I can bide until arrangements can be made. Quick, boy—saddle a horse and let us go."

"The horses are all gone, my lord," said Rob.

"All gone? So that is how they treat me.

Then we must walk until we find one. Surely my people will help their chief."

"There is a pony, your lordship," cried Rob, and going to the stable he led out the powerful little beast.

Shuffling back to the house, Lovat crept up the creaking stairway and returned some minutes later with his strong box.

"Fasten it behind the saddle, Rob," he said, "or better still can I trust ye to carry it?"

He stood for a moment glooming at the ground and then begun to hunt amongst his pockets for a piece of paper which, when he had found it, he read most carefully and tittered in a strange falsetto manner to himself.

Then taking a silver whistle from his waistcoat he blew it three times and took to breathing upon his frozen fingers.

From the heather a hundred yards up the glen two men had risen at the first note, and came running towards them—long-haired, ragged gillies, Fraser by their tartan. They stood a little way from Lovat, watching him like dogs ready for the trail. The frost of their night watch stood upon their bonnets and their beards were stiff and glistening. Waving Rob aside Lovat began to speak to them in a low tone, but before he had said more than a dozen words his voice rose to a scream through the influence of some private passion, and he menaced them in Gaelic so that

they quailed before his clenched fist. But as suddenly his voice dropped and he caressed them, patting their cheeks and then dismissing them, stood panting beside Rob—all the fire gone—once more just an old sick man.

Very slowly he clambered upon the pony, and so they started and began to pass the cluster of huts near Gortuleg. The frightened people trooped out of their doors to see their chief go by, and a dozen Frasers armed with muskets and swords gathered about him and trudged in silence towards the west.

At the corner of the brae Lovat turned and looked back on Gortuleg. Beneath his bullying, tyrannical, shifty character there was a kind of bedrock of that highly coloured sentiment that is akin to melodrama. He played to the gallery with infinite zest and genuine enjoyment. It was a nice pose to combat the diminishing power of the chieftainship—where force was a dangerous weapon, sentiment was often a two-edged sword.

"Farewell," he said, in his deep voice and with honest tears in his eyes, "for maybe I shall never see you again."

It did not matter that the house was not his, nor an imposing habitation at the best of times. All that mattered was that he was at the turn of the brae, going downward—an exiled chief. Fully concious that the setting was saga-like the clansmen set up a piteous lamenta-

tion, and bowing his great head Lovat motioned them on, and the journey continued. And in this fashion after many weary hours they reached Loch Muilzie in Glenstrathfarar and for the time being considered themselves in safety.

Far away, dimly discernible in that wilderness of heather, two men were running like wolves on the trail—two men with dirks by their sides, and death in their hearts—running tirelessly. On the outskirts of the Fraser country they passed another man who was watching the pass and without a word he joined them—three men running in single file, bending double in open places—heading for Knoidart.

Long after, when the sun was falling, Muckle John pulled in his horse for the third time within an hour and listened intently. From the drenched hillside a curlew was crying amongst the shadows, and from up the hill came the clamour of a muir-fowl.

But no whisper of the danger that lurked unseen amongst the silences—awaiting the night.

And then with troubled eyes he continued his way, taking cover where he could, seeking a place of refuge.

CHAPTER V

LOCH ARKAIG

DAY followed day with no sign of the soldiers, and as time passed, Rob wished most fervently that Muckle John had not disappeared so abruptly, leaving him in an unknown country with a helpless old man.

One morning there was a movement in Lovat's hut and the old chief stood peering out of the doorway looking very savage and uncouth. He had forgotten to place his wig on his head and the scattered tags of grey hair were caught by every gust of wind.

"Rob," he said at last, shivering with the cold, "take a day in the hills and learn where the English are and whether a French frigate is off the coast."

Only too glad to fall in with such a suggestion Rob prepared to set off at once. Suddenly Lord Lovat called to him.

"Rob," he said, "where did you come from that night?"

"I came from Culloden."

"Culloden—and did you meet anyone on the road?"

"Only Muckle John."

The Fraser's cold eyes swooped down on him like a hawk dropping from the clouds.

"Muckle John," he repeated, "I seem to know the name—so you came with him did ye? And where were you, Rob, when the horsemen arrived? Was Muckle John with you then?"

"No, he had left me."

"Of course—of course—and then he came back and told you he was going away on important business, Rob."

"He said he would return."

At that Lovat left him, laughing as though something mightily funny had been said. But at the door he turned, still convulsed with his humour, and wagging a finger at him remarked:

"Mind my words, laddie, the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong."

But Rob only looked at him in wonder, seeing nothing but an old sick man overtaken by dotage.

Then setting out upon the heather he made for the head of Loch Arkaig.

Throughout the day he saw no glimpse of red-coats, and when evening was falling he stepped boldly down upon the shore of the loch, and thence onward to Lochnanuagh, where, to his excitement, the white sails of a frigate were bellied out with the breeze. Hastily concealing himself he peered through the heather upon the beach where a great number of people, principally Camerons and Macdonalds,

were collected, and with them a squarely built, consequential little man very plainly dressed, who seemed greatly agitated about the numbers on the shore and anxious to disperse the crowd at all costs. But the more he cajoled and threatened the more closely they thronged the beach, and in the meanwhile the frigate had run down her anchor and lowered a boat. In it Rob could distinguish four men and some cargo, which had been slung down from the deck. On the shore there was a sudden silence almost startling after the clash of voices before. The creak of the rowlocks came nearer, and though far up the hill—so still was the day—Rob could catch the French manner of their speech, and once he heard the small man upon the beach cough and blow his nose.

But immediately the keel of the boat grated upon the shingle, the greatest animation was displayed. The sailors threw the cargo (which comprised some half-dozen little casks) upon the sand, and under the instructions of the little man they were carried into a secluded place and a rope slipped round them, whereupon he set about paying the sailors.

At that moment, however, there was a sullen boom like the noise of a gun far out at sea, and without a second's delay the boat shot away to the frigate, the anchor was raised, and running up her canvas she wheeled like a sea-bird and catching the breeze sped towards open water.

From the noise of firing out at sea it was apparent that an action was in progress between an English man-of-war and the French ships.

The excitement upon the beach now boiled to fever heat. The hills nearest the bay were soon black with spectators, and in the midst of this new sensation the casks upon the beach were forgotten by all except the little man.

Indeed, had he not passed so close leading a Shetland pony very carefully and yet urging it to its fullest speed, Rob would never have remembered the landing of that mysterious cargo and consequently never have been mixed up in the tragedy of gold. But to Rob there was something enormously mystifying about the character of this solitary traveller, with his anxious manner, and the rattling casks ranged high upon the pony's flanks. It was like an old wife's tale of the fairies and their secret kegs of heather ale.

Partly because they were going the same road—partly because his curiosity was awake—he followed him through the heather, keeping a sharp eye meanwhile, for again and again the man upon the track would swing suddenly about and send his gaze ranging the hill-side for fear of being followed by the people on the shore. But always he did so with the utmost haste, urging the pony onwards after each halt, as though he feared the approach of night, or something that Rob knew nothing about.

And so they reached Loch Arkaig, and on the shore of the loch the man seemed to hesitate and take thought, and then hitching the pony to a tree he conveyed the casks to the sand beside the edge of the heather, and flinging off his coat, drew a spade from a hidden place and commenced to dig.

Twilight had come, and so shadowy had the shore grown that Rob crept nearer, wriggling through the tufts of heather and rock as noiselessly as an Indian.

Suddenly, however, he saw the head and shoulders of some one else silhouetted against the grey surface before him, a man who crouched and ducked his head as the digging ceased or recommenced upon the beach with the same care that he himself was practising. It was evident to Rob that there was more in all of this than he had imagined.

At last, apparently satisfied, the watcher began to retreat towards him, running on all fours up the hill-side. So rapidly did he come, indeed, that Rob had no time to roll out of the way, and with a swift bound the newcomer flung his full weight upon him, uttering no sound whatever, and together they rolled over and over in each other's arms.

One moment Rob was uppermost, then the other, who seemed all arms and legs and sharp clawing fingers. Twice Rob felt his throat gripped and two thumbs upon his windpipe, and each time

he managed to jerk his head away. Then with a swift dive of his right arm he reached the knife in his stocking, and pulling it out he plunged it into his assailant's shoulder. It was a small blade, ill-fitted for dangerous work such as this; but a thin scream told him that he had penetrated the man's thick great-coat. Then perceiving his opponent jerk his head about with the pain, Rob clutched a heavy stone and driving it against his temple sent him senseless upon the ground.

It was a narrow escape, but fortune had apparently come to his aid in the nick of time. With a gasp of relief he sprang to his feet, when out of the darkness a voice said: "Stand, or I fire!" and the cold barrel of a pistol was rammed against his cheek.

He had forgotten the man upon the shore.

"I am unarmed," gasped Rob; "and it is the man upon the ground whom you should guard against, not me."

At that the pistol was lowered, and seating himself the newcomer laid it upon his knee and ordered him to relate his account of the fight, to which he listened with the closest interest. Then rising he bound the unconscious man's arms and legs with some rope which lay upon the beach, and thrust a rough gag into his mouth.

"And now, my lad," said he, "tell me what brings you here."

With some hesitation Rob related his experiences of the last two days, and when he had finished his companion clapped him upon the back.

"Bravely done," he said; "and let me tell you that Archibald Cameron is proud to meet ye." So saying he wrung him warmly by the hand and sprang to his feet.

He was that Dr. Archibald Cameron, brother to Lochiel, who was to suffer death at the hands of the Government in the year '53, a very gallant gentleman and the last to fall in the Stuart cause.

The moon was climbing into the sky as they stepped towards their prisoner; but Cameron first took Rob aside and whispered in his ear:

"What I buried," said he, speaking in the Lowland tongue, "would set the Highlands in a blaze. It is a merciful Providence you turned up as you did. For now we can hide it all the easier in another place, or maybe two places. But give me your oath on the naked dirk that no word of it will ever pass your lips except to the Prince."

"The Prince?" echoed Rob, who had followed him with difficulty.

"And who else? Did ye no jump to what the bonny casks meant? French gold, boy—enough to buy every claymore in the Highlands and Argyll as well. Now d'ye see? Come, Rob."

With that, Cameron approached the man upon the ground and motioned Rob to take his legs while he grasped him by the arms. So they made for a hollow place, and as they laid him down he groaned and opened his eyes, and at that moment the moon, clearing the tops of the trees, played its pale shafts upon the ghastly face of Ephraim Macaulay, late schoolmaster in Inverness.

CHAPTER VI

THE WATCHERS BY NIGHT

DARKNESS overtook Muckle John to the south of Loch Garry in the Macdonald country. He had travelled without halt all day, keeping to the less frequented roads, and seeing on every side traces of the panic that followed Culloden. In every village was the same terror and the same frantic haste—some burying claymores with desperate hands so that they remained only half covered—others taking to the hills with their wives and little ones. Once a party of two hundred or more passed him on the road making for the south-west. They wore the look of men utterly dispirited, limping in broken ranks for all the blithe playing of a piper at their head.

Then plunging on through the heather he put mile after mile between him and Fort Augustus.

It was about three on the same afternoon that he pulled in his horse very sharply and swinging about gazed back. He was not sure that he had heard anything. It was more a premonition than anything else, but a northerner pays close heed to such things.

Everything was very lifeless and dreary on

the road he had come. There was no sign of man or beast. With a grim look in his eyes Muckle John continued his journey.

But about an hour later he swerved behind a ledge of rock and cantered swiftly up the hill, keeping behind a huddle of crag for some hundred yards. Then turning as rapidly he watched the back trail. Several minutes passed and there was no sign of living thing. Presently, however, something moved ever so slightly just where the last rock towered out of the heather. A man's head rose and fell again.

With a faint smile Muckle John continued his way. His horse was very tired—twice it had nearly fallen through pure weariness. That it could carry him little further he realized at once. He did not know how many pursuers were on his track, but he put them down as Highland caterans ready to cut a throat for a purse. In that case they would wait till he slept, and rush upon him. It was, therefore, a matter of life or death for him to find a place of refuge before the sun fell.

The evening was closing in and he was so tired that he nodded as he rode. Nowhere in that rolling desolate country could he see a house or any trace of clachan or croft. And behind him waiting for darkness were men as crafty and cruel as Indians and just as patient. If not to-night then to-morrow, and he might wander over—miles of heather for days on end.

Meanwhile the brain of Muckle John was working. The future lay open to him like a man reading a map. He must throw them off the scent or perish. If not to-night—to-morrow. He would never come to grips with them—that he knew too well. It would be in his heavy sleep in the blackness of a Highland night. It must not be thought Muckle John was much concerned at the prospect. Those were days when life was not held dearly, and when a soldier of fortune might be hard put to it several times in a week. It was more the indignity of the business that irritated him. He was not accustomed to being stalked like a young stag. Most men gave Muckle John a wide berth.

Even as he brooded on the matter the grey horse tripped and fell. No power on earth could have kept it on its feet. It was utterly done. With a groan it collapsed upon its knees and rolled over on its side. Muckle John had slipped off as it staggered and now stood above it studying the next move. He was above all anxious to get a glimpse of his pursuers. Loosening his sword and taking a pistol from his great-coat pocket, he lay alongside the horse as though his leg were securely fastened beneath it in its fall. It was an old trick, but this was a country of few horses and worth a trial. He knew that they would close in on him if they saw him apparently crippled and at

their mercy. Slowly the minutes passed and there was no sound, while a mist rose from the moist bed of the valley and hung in wreaths between the hills. Muckle John lay perfectly still, his pistol hidden beneath the tail of his coat, one leg stretched over the horse's flank, the other doubled up beneath him.

Near at hand a stone clinked at the burnside. It might have been a hill fox creeping away, but Muckle John knew that a fox does not do such things. He felt the eyes of some one upon him—but he could see nothing, and all the time the darkness was falling swiftly and his nerves were strained to the uttermost, waiting as he was upon his side for the rush of perhaps a dozen men.

Up the hill he heard an owl call and at that he smiled, for he knew—who better—that it was not the night for owls to cry Glengarry way, and that there is a world of difference between the call of a man and the call of an owl except to those who have never made it their business to note such things.

It was all falling out as he had expected, and he waited quite coolly for what was to come, foreseeing nothing of what really happened. Indeed it all came about so swiftly and so silently that few save Muckle John would have lived to learn another lesson in methods of attack.

Now there was an eminence immediately above him, such a natural frontage of rock as

one sees on many a hill-side—places naturally avoided by the wild things unless they travel up wind or come upon them from above. Muckle John was looking upward when it happened. He was quite aware of the danger he ran, but he was waiting for a man's head to show itself against the sky-line just over the ledge. Suddenly, without warning but with only a muffled scraping like small pebbles scattered wildly, the sky was blotted out altogether, and at that Muckle John leaped like a hare and leaped just a thousandth fraction too late. The boulder, for that was of course what had been launched to crush him, killed the dying horse on the instant. But it also smashed the pistol of Muckle John and crumpled his sword like a thin strip of tin, imprisoning the tail of his great-coat in the ruin. It was neck or nothing now, and wrenching himself free he gave one glance at his arms and flinging them down set off through the trees that fringed the hill-side—running for his life. Knowing that his pursuers were probably tired men he set the pace in the hope of flinging them off, keeping the upper part of the hill, seldom stumbling for all his riding-boots and the darkness, and sometimes pausing for a breath of time to hear whether he had cast them off. But always at the same distance behind him he caught the dull padding of feet like wolves on the trail—tireless as deer. He made use of

every feint he knew. He doubled on his tracks, he took refuge in places beneath crags. But always silently, patiently, utterly undaunted they came on. He could not see them but he heard them moving ever nearer, biding their time. There might be six or there might be twenty—he could not tell.

A desperate plan occurred to him to carry the war into the enemy's country—to pick off single men and throttle them noiselessly in the heather. But there was danger in that. He was unarmed now, and some one might give the alarm and they would overcome him in the struggle. Stumbling on he looked about him for a river or a loch in which he could swim to safety, or some cleft in a rock where he could hope to meet his assailants single-handed.

But there was nothing in all that dreary maze of darkness, and with anger and despair in his heart he settled down to a long tireless trot, waiting to outwit them if he could.

It was about two hours later that the moon filtered thin shafts of grey light through the scurrying clouds, and in a twinkling the landscape showed dimly and Muckle John found himself at a narrow pass running between two hills with a precipice of rock reaching up hundreds of feet on either side. Then the moon disappeared and he set off at a great pace up the rocky track, knowing that here, if at all, there lay a way to safety. On each side was the

smooth surface of rock. There was no place to take refuge, but who could tell what use might be made of such a place? He must have covered half a mile at a quick pace—all the quicker because he knew that those upon his heels, running barefoot, would be handicapped by the loose stones and jagged edges of rock —when he came out upon the open moorland again and on the breath of the wind he caught the smell of cattle. And at once he saw a way.

Again the moon trailed out upon the misty sky and with eager eyes Muckle John searched the vapour. A clump of shaggy dripping coats huddled in a sheltered place to his right, that was all, but it satisfied Muckle John, for very quickly, knowing that there was not a moment to lose, he drew near to them and running amongst them, with a great shout brought them lumbering and snorting wildly to their feet. A vast Highland bull bellowed in the driving mist, but seeing nothing stamped his feet and shook his horns uncertainly. Then unsheathing a small knife, Muckle John drove the blade into a heifer beside him and sent it at a gallop towards the pass. Running hither and thither, but always avoiding the bull, he kept them moving, moving, until the head of the narrow way was reached, and at that he drew back and halted for the moon.

It came again in all serenity, streaming on to

the desolate place with a thin forlorn kind of light, making the shadow of Muckle John look very large and the clump of cattle, some fifty of them and their perplexed and irritated leader, look like the cattle of a dream.

The time was ripe. With a strange noise in his throat like the roar of a stag Muckle John dropped upon his hands and made towards them on all fours—a weird enough spectacle on a lonely moor and very unnerving under a hazed moon. It was the last straw to the agitated beasts packed at the head of the pass. For a moment the bull stood his ground, but his heart failed him, being a bull barely three years old, and losing his head he set the panic ablaze. It was helter-skelter down the gorge and Muckle John at the back of them with his naked knife in their flanks. Again and again his wild cry rose and fell, faster and faster they thundered on until nothing could have stopped them—least of all three Frasers caught just midway like rats in a trap. What happened can never be known in its grim detail. But the herd passed on, and the beat of their feet died down and was swallowed up in the silent night.

And after them Muckle John, scanning the ground behind them, treading leisurely down the moonlit pass. Suddenly he paused and shivered at what he saw. Then walking on he paused again, and once more about fifty yards away he bent his head, and this time he

took up a flutter of blood-stained tartan and peered at it very closely.

Presently he grinned like a dog.

"Fraser," he said, "what brings Frasers so far from Lovat at such a time—except to carry a message at the end of a dirk? What will Lovat say when he waits for news of the killing of Muckle John and he waits in vain?"

He stared at the strip of tartan for a long time, and then setting it on a ledge of rock he cut it into three equal parts.

"I doubt," he said grimly, "but there'll be a coronach playing when the last of you comes home."

Then making his way to the head of the pass he lay down underneath the shadow of a rock and settled himself to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

BURIED TREASURE

A FAINT cry of dismay fell from Rob's lips as he met the evil glare in the schoolmaster's eyes. Cameron, too, seemed more than a little shaken at the encounter, though he said nothing, but appeared plunged in thought about the future.

In the hollow place where they stood, it was impossible for their prisoner to see anything save the open sky, and a thousand twinkling stars.

After a moment Cameron stepped gingerly beside him, and pulled at his bonds. Then, tearing a strip of cloth from off Macaulay's shirt, he bound it round his eyes as though to hide their gleaming malice from sight.

"Come, Rob," he said, in a whisper, "there's work for you and me this night. When we have ended we will set him free," and he led the way back to the shore.

It was very still and lonesome there with only the soft wash of the loch and the sighing of the wind amongst the trees, and Rob wished the matter well over, and himself back in the comparative security of Lovat's company.

"While I dig them up you roll them along the right bank," whispered Cameron, warning him to keep in the depths of the heather, "and

lay them down in the shadow of the burn that joins the loch yonder. Should you hear a sound come back and warn me. Och!" he concluded, stepping into the moonlight, "but these are strange times." Then bending his back he sent the spade deep into the sand.

"It's fortunate for you that I caught him watching," whispered Rob, full of pride at his discovery.

"Man," said Cameron, "do I look sic a gomeral? I knew he was there from the moment I hitched the pony to the tree. Had he gone it would have fallen out just as I planned."

And so began the flight of the treasure—Rob creeping through the darkness of the trees, rolling a cask, stealing noiseless as a shadow over the wet leaves and bracken, and all the time seeing in the black night the terrible eyes of Ephraim Macaulay marking his every step. Backwards and forwards until his back ached, and the moisture stood heavy upon his brow. In the passive stillness of the night there was no breath of danger, no whisper of heather alive with fugitives, and spies, and nameless wanderers.

As he made for the slope with the last cask he saw Cameron smoothing over the place with cunning hands, and patting the marks of his footsteps about the sand. Then he too followed, and together they knelt by the stream.

"Now, Rob," said Cameron, "first there'll

be a score of Highland caterans scanning this shore, and after that there'll be the red-coats, who are sure to get wind of it; and so it's our business, ye ken, to mak' siccar* of this. Maybe ye hae never hidden treasure, Rob, so let us have a crack about it. Come ye nearer. Now, when our friend in the hollow there gets his freedom he'll show a clear pair o' heels to those who sent him, an' I'm uncommon interested to ken just who they are."

"No, no," said Rob, with a touch of importance; "he is after me. He is a schoolmaster of Inverness. . . ."

"Oh! Maybe, maybe," broke in Cameron. "He is capable of being all that. But it's mair than you, Rob—though I hate to seem to undervalue your importance, laddie."

"Then he is not . . ."

"Whisht! What does it matter who he is? So ye understand, Rob. Follow him, and see whether he makes north or south, and then when ye know that I will send you on a journey, for I am travelling east mysel'."

"But Lord Lovat."

The man beside him started.

"What of him, Rob?" he asked quickly.

"Maybe he will require me."

Cameron laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Rob," said he very gravely, "Lord Lovat will require mair than you to save his auld

* Certain.

neck, and for mercy's sake dinna breathe a word of this night's wark to him—nor to onybody but the one ye ken of."

"No," said Rob, "to nobody but the Prince."

"Come then, for time passes. When the search for this treasure commences—for mark you a score of eyes must have been watching me just as closely as your own—what will they do when they dig on the sand and find an empty huddle o' stanes? They will examine the neighbourhood for traces of spade work and footsteps. They know a single man like mysel' could not carry those casks mair than a hundred yards. They'd come straight here, Rob, like a pack of hounds on the trail."

"What can we do?" asked Rob, fearing his work was thrown away.

"There is just one thing to do, Rob, and that maybe will sound mighty ludicrous; but it is always the foolish tricks that are the hardest to unravel. When I asked you to show yoursel' upon the lochside, where it is mair light than I had looked for, it was because I had a thought, Rob, and it's just this: there are one or two gentry in this neighbourhood uncommon anxious to watch my doings this night, and, being a modest man, Rob, I'm no overpleased at the notion," and he brought his head a little nearer. "Supposing, Rob," he whispered, "you were to take my place upon the lochside for a wee half an hour, or maybe a little over?"

"Take your place?"

"Aye; put on my wig and coat (the hat I shall require), and when the moon is hid by a cloud, just scrunch upon the pebbles, and sit ye doon so that your kilt is hid. It would tak' the eyes o' an owl to see anything amiss in this dim light, Rob. Will ye do it, lad? Would ye? It is for the Prince, bless him."

"Give me your wig and coat," said Rob for answer.

With a sigh of relief and no further word, Cameron set the wig upon his head, and wrapped the long great-coat about him, turning up the collar. Then they remained in silence gazing at the cold grey sky.

"Quick," said he, at last, "there's a cloud coming," and he pushed Rob gently from the gloom of the trees. At the same time he sang a line of a song for any who might doubt him, and fell back out of sight.

When the moon swam out of the fleeting patch of cloud it fell upon the figure of a man who was sitting on a low piece of rock, with his elbows on his knees, and his back to the shore, and in the dead stillness of the night who could guess how many watched that black, crouching form, wondering why he never rose or walked about, but only sat with his chin in his hand, staring out across the loch.

Meanwhile Cameron passed noiselessly back to the place where the casks lay. Forewarned

is forearmed, and he was not foolish enough to suppose that the hiding of treasure in the Cameron country would be an easy matter.

His clan had much love for him, but they also had an uncommon respect for gold, and times were hard. So a week before the frigate had flashed into Loch-na-nuagh he had dug a hole under a rock in the stream which ran into Loch Arkaig, and inside the hole had hidden a small barrel for holding half the contents of the casks (which contained bags of louis d'or). The other half, for safety, he had resolved to conceal elsewhere, while the casks, empty of gold, he had decided to bury in a hasty fashion just where Rob had placed them.

And in this manner the stiff work began, for only two hours of darkness remained.

Happily the wind had risen, and the sound of his preparations were unheard. That Cameron was nervous and anxious to be done one could have told by his frenzied haste. First he walked upstream for fifty yards with a bag upon his shoulders. Then he slid a large boulder across the waterfall to divert the current, and dropped his burden under the bed of the stream, where the open barrel was ready to receive them. Then he returned, never putting foot upon dry land, and so, with an aching back and bleeding fingers, he toiled on until at last the barrel was full and the lid on, and the stone rolled back so that the water rushed over the spot under which the treasure lay.

The digging of a hole for the casks down the stream then commenced, and that ready, Cameron set off towards the mouth of the burn in the opposite direction from where the first portion of the gold lay buried; and still wading in the current, he began to approach the shore. About a score of yards from the loch a great rock rose by the side of the burn, and some six feet above it a single branch of a tree swayed stiffly in the night breeze, extending in a straight line from the trunk, for near the shore the hill-side was woody and thick with undergrowth.

Now the hardest part of the work began. He first of all slipped a piece of rope through the loop of the remaining bags holding the end of it in his hand. For a moment he rested, then leaping upon the rock, he crouched an instant, and sprang straight for the thick branch above him. Grasping it tightly, he swung himself cross-legged upon it, and leaning over began to haul the bags up beside him, slinging the rope securely about the tree.

Having detached the first bag, he conveyed it along the branch, and, smoothing aside the leaves, there was revealed a hole in the trunk of the tree about the size of a saucer, into which he squeezed it. This he did many times, until the contents of the second half of the casks were inside the hollow trunk, and then rearranging the leaves, he took a bird's nest very gravely from inside his hat, and laying it over the hole, slipped a couple of eggs from a little

bag round his neck inside it, and let himself down again upon the rock.

Then burying the casks as he had planned, and that but carelessly, so that the top of one of them even stuck a little through the turf, he threw a few gold pieces upon the ground. The work was finished. Stealing back, he gave a low call to Rob, who, waiting a moment, slipped back to his side.

Cameron without a word slipped on the great-coat and his wig again, and patting Rob upon the shoulder, led him down upon the beach, where the bright moonlight made the loch gleam like beaten silver. The spade he had concealed in a secret place.

"Let us have a crack together for a moment," said he in a low voice. "That we will be seen is probable, but I think none watched just now. Ye might wonder why I," he continued, speaking more loudly, and with his head turned a little towards the trees, "who have exercised such care, have trusted you, Rob, who are a stranger to me. Then I just canna tell you, for I do not know, and that's the sober truth. Anyway here is a plan o' the places and other things; and dinna let this out of your hands, Rob, and if ye are taken, swallow it, or destroy it in some way. In case we are watched take it from my hand as though we were saying good-bye. Now!" and extending his right hand, Cameron cried, "Good-bye, Rob," in a very clear voice,

and made to pass the paper ; but with a flustered movement he bungled it, dropping it upon the ground.

" Tuts ! " said he, and stooping quickly made a great business of thrusting it into Rob's hands. " Follow that spy to-night," he said, " and then haste ye on the footsteps of the Prince, and tell him that I wait his instructions in Lochaber. Should ye need me send word that ' there's a muir-fowl snared.' Mind the words, laddie, for I'll ken by that ye are taken."

At that moment there was a small noise like a sigh behind them, and Cameron started and peered into the darkness.

" Speak lower," he said, " you understand ? "

" I do," Rob replied.

" Then come. Let us set the fellow loose, and after that the less we see of Arkaig the better." So saying he led the way to the hollow place.

The moonlight shone smoothly down between the swaying tree-tops, but it fell upon empty greensward and bristling heather. No man lay there. Not even his ropes remained. It was as though he had been spirited away. Without a word, Cameron drew Rob swiftly back.

" Separate and run," he whispered in an agitated voice, " for we must be surrounded," and bending his body he darted amongst the trees towards the open hill-side. At that Rob overtaken by a sudden fear of the unknown,

and a great dread of Ephraim Macaulay, took to his heels, and running in a direction at right angles to that in which Cameron had gone, he doubled on his tracks, and dropped down under a bank of heather.

Fortunate it was he had done so, for swift flying footsteps sounded close above his head, and two men sped past him into the wood. Then, crawling on hands and feet, he made for the head of the loch. But he had travelled a bare five hundred yards before the clear soft note like the sound of a chanter drifted towards him. And the bar that it played was the fantastic, ghostly tune of Muckle John, the same twisted melody that had so shaken the schoolmaster in Miss Macpherson's house.

Nearer it came, and he lay flat upon the ground with a fallen tree before him. Suddenly on to the moonlit shore stepped a figure he could not mistake—the huge shoulders and chest, the massive head of Muckle John himself. And as he played he peered this way and that, as though he were in search of some one.

Rob was about to run forward, then as quickly he sank lower in the shadow. Something held him back.

Presently Muckle John laid aside the instrument, and whistled the haunting catch of tune in the moonlight.

CHAPTER VIII

FLIGHT

FEAR of the night, the unknown prowlers in the heather, the escape of the schoolmaster, and above all the danger to his paper, held Rob in a breathless silence.

And all the time Muckle John was walking towards him, whistling softly as he came. Passing a few yards to the left of the fallen tree behind which Rob was crouching he halted suddenly, and then in a leisurely fashion seated himself on the trunk of it, with the tails of his coat almost touching Rob's cheek.

For long enough he remained with his elbows upon his knees staring out upon the loch, and yet Rob never stirred, biding his time. At last with a profound sigh Muckle John began to speak to himself in a low, musing voice, like a man troubled about something and doubtful about the course he should take.

"Poor Rob," he said, "where has he got to now?" Upon which he sighed again and shook his head. "I doubt," he murmured, "that they've taken him—for he no answered my bit whistle. He would have answered had he heard, for he promised me, and Rob's no the lad to go back upon his word—oh no, you'd

never suspect Rob of that," and he paused in a heart-breaking manner as though emotion had fairly overcome him. As for Rob, it was all he could do not to spring up and catch him by the hands; but he lay like a stone, utterly miserable, hating the paper and his wretched suspicions.

"Besides," continued Muckle John more briskly, "I saved the laddie's life, and glad to do it. Oh, no, no; dinna tell me that Rob heard the whistle and ran his neck into the noose I was calling him from. Poor Rob," said he again, "I doubt but he's laid by the heels by this time."

Then he stirred a little and began to button his coat.

"I must save Rob," said he in a mighty determined tone, and at that the boy touched him softly on the coat.

"Muckle John," he whispered.

The man beside him started violently, and came near to falling off the log altogether, so great appeared to be his astonishment. But with an effort at recovery he pushed Rob back.

"Down," he whispered, in Gaelic, "down for your life," and he began to stretch himself as though he had fallen to sleep. "Rob," he murmured at last, "I hope ye did na hear my vapourings."

"I fear I did," replied Rob.

"Well, well, there's no harm where no ill was spoken. But I was hurt, ye ken, that you did

not heed my whistle. Speak low, Rob, for there's been a man behind yon tuft o' heather for the last half-hour."

"I was feared," said Rob, "Ephraim Macaulay was loosed and oh—Muckle John, I . . ."

"No suspected me, surely ?" he gasped.

"I was feared, ye see, and . . ."

But Muckle John shook his head, and fell into a soliloquy in Lowland Scots.

"Oh, Rob, Rob," he said, "this is no pleasant hearing. It makes things difficult. I'm minded to leave ye, Rob, though I shrink frae doing so, for the country is fair hotching with spies and sic' like, and at this present moment, there's a wheen men with eyes fair glued to this spot, and all o' them just hungering for the dawn. It's a dangerous ploy ye're engaged upon, Rob, and one beside which Culloden was as snug as snaring rabbits," and he sighed again with his eyes up on the loch.

"Rob," he broke out suddenly, "it's enough to mak' me die with shame when I say it, but it's Macaulay ye think I loosed. Come then, Rob, and follow me, and I swear on the naked dirk I'll show ye Macaulay," and sliding through the undergrowth, he beckoned back to him. In this manner taking advantage of every scrap of cover, they reached the wood where the mist was rising before the dawn.

At this point Muckle John advanced very

cautiously upon his hands and feet, and Rob marvelled at so large a man moving as softly as a cat. Of a sudden, however, he dropped upon his stomach and waggled his foot as a warning. For men's voices in muttered Gaelic came from behind a rock immediately to their right.

"He cannot have left the shore, Angus," said one, "for Neil is watching the brae and we will close in on him at sunrise. Besides, he is only a boy."

"There is a great man with him, Donald; who will he be?"

"I am not knowing for sure, Angus, but belike he has taken to the heather like many another pretty fellow, though he looked like one ye know of, whose name I will not be mentioning. Whoever he is—he will not be meddling with us, Angus."

"But where can the Captain have got to—he was watching Archie Cameron and then he disappeared, and Cameron too."

With a backward look Muckle John stole on, and Rob and he passed into the heart of the wood and up to the hollow place where Macaulay had disappeared. There Muckle John straightened himself, and pushing aside the bracken at the lower end of the hollow he beckoned to Rob.

"There," he said, "is your prisoner," and sure enough there lay the bound and silent form of Ephraim Macaulay.

"But how did he get here?" asked Rob. "He could not have rolled."

"Rob," replied Muckle John, "I will be franker with you than you have been with me. I brought him here mysel'."

"You?"

"And who else? But let that be I have a notion that we must hurry," and he began to unloose the ropes about the prisoner's hands.

Rob watched him without a word, too perplexed to speak.

"Muckle John," he whispered at last, "could we no mak' use of his clothes?"

"Tuts," he replied, "it's evident ye were much impressed with Culloden day; but I would scorn to use an auld trick like that twice in one week. There are folk, Rob, would send the word round that Muckle John was no what he was," and he turned again to Macaulay and loosed his feet. But the gag he left in his mouth, only removing the bandage from his eyes. "Now, sir," he went on, addressing Macaulay in a low voice, "I have here a dirk which does its work secretly and yet with dispatch. Ye take my meaning? I have also a loaded pistol in my pocket, and I flatter myself you are acquainted with my marksmanship. Before we start upon our jaunt there are one or two questions I would ask ye. Just nod your head and I'll excuse a civil answer. I take it that we are surrounded here?"

A violent nod could just be discerned in the gloom.

"Thank ye. In which quarter are your people gathered? Point with your hand."

After a momentary hesitation the prisoner pointed towards the west.

"Brawly done, sir, I knew I could trust you to lie. So we will gang to the left just to spite ye. Now walk between us, and mind, my dirk is itching for a dig into your ribs. If we are challenged say it is only twa o' your friends, and at the first word o' treachery I'll stick you like a pig." With this caution, he drew the gag out of Macaulay's mouth.

"Hark ye, Rob," he went on in a low tone. "There are a score of men around this place, and they're after something with which you are no unacquainted. Should we win through there will be no rest for us till we are well out of the Cameron country—but I doubt the length and breadth of the Highlands will hardly be large enough."

All this he said in a very grave voice, and then taking Macaulay by the arm, he led him towards the hill-front with Rob upon his other side.

The dawn was near at hand and the driving mist fell cold as ice upon their faces. Down below them they could see the cold sheen of the loch, and hear the wild fowl crying in the reeds. After a full quarter of a mile Muckle John halted.

"Now, Rob," said he, "we have reached their line of watchers. As we pass up the brae, we will be scanned by many an unseen eye. Dinna speak, but nod to me when I address ye, and tak' the upper side, for you are nane the waur for a bit heightening," and with that they left the shelter of the trees. In the dim, grey light, the hillside looked very wan and desolate. A whaup was crying mournfully over a lonely pool of hill water. Like a shadow a dog-fox, homeward bound, slipped over the path and was swallowed up amongst the crags.

No other sound reached their ears.

Suddenly from the heather at their very feet a man leapt up—a squat, red-headed fellow with a naked dirk in his hand. Something in Macaulay's dim face seemed to have aroused his suspicions.

"Who are you?" he cried in Gaelic.

"Answer him," growled Muckle John in Macaulay's ear, but before he could say a word, the Highlander had scanned Rob's face, and with a shrill warning scream he leaped backward into the heather. It was his last mortal word. With a whistle of flying steel Muckle John whipped his claymore free, and lunging as it swung from the scabbard, drove the blade in to the hilt.

With a terrible cry the man slithered backwards and coughed, and Rob turned sick at the manner in which he writhed in the heather.

Through the mist half a dozen forms came running in their direction. There was not a moment to lose. Hastily disengaging his sword, Muckle John flung his great-coat about the head of the schoolmaster, and hurling him down the hillside dragged Rob to his knees with a hand upon his mouth.

The clatter of Macaulay's flying form and his muffled cries drew the newcomers past the place where they lay, and then springing to his hands and feet Muckle John made off in the opposite direction into the heart of the swirling mist. There was a brief silence and then far away, came a shrill yell taken up again and again until every crag seemed alive with voices, and the faint glow of the rising sun made their escape seem impossible.

"They've found him," cried Muckle John, mounting the hillside at a great pace with Rob at his heels, "so it's save your breath and follow me."

There was little cover on that part of the hill, and it was evident from the frenzied shouts rising from below, that their pursuers had seen them crossing an open space.

"Quicker, Rob!" cried Muckle John, darting away like a hare, his head bent below his shoulders as he ran.

At last, when they had reached a mass of crags and loose stones, he dropped behind the first, dodging back along the upper part of the

slope, while Rob scrambled behind him. They halted for a moment, about five hundred yards higher than the way they had passed a few minutes before, and Muckle John peeped round a boulder and scanned the misty slope beneath.

"Look," said he at last. Far below, by stretching his head forward, Rob saw many forms moving like dots amongst the heather. Foremost of all came Ephraim Macaulay, waving them on; then, in a rude half-moon, swept some thirty ragged Highlanders, shock-headed, bearded, fierce looking caterans, racing like dogs upon the trail.

"Broken men," said Muckle John grimly, watching them as keenly as a fox watches the hounds. "Cameron rogues and nameless cattle. Would we were out of this country."

The sun was rising over the glen, and even in that hour of deadly peril Rob must needs admire the gold light upon the blue loch, and the fresh greenness of the spring in the trees far below.

Their pursuers had now reached the point where they had doubled back along the hill, and here they were put out, searching the rocks, and spying along the other slope and making closer search.

"It was that last burst did it, Rob," whispered Muckle John, in a glow at his cleverness; "but I must admit I'm no liking the position. They're anxious to lay hands on ye, Rob, and that's the

truth. I'm thinking it must be grand information ye carry, but I'm no the man to question onybody about what best concerns himsel'." Shaking his head he took to watching the movements of their pursuers again.

"I wish I could tell you, Muckle John," replied Rob unhappily.

"Och," said he with a great show of indifference, "I was only daffing ye. It's maybe only because ye were seen wi' Archie Cameron. He's no good company for folk just now."

"He's a brave gentleman, Muckle John."

"Oh, maybe; but there's aye some one to bring up stories against a man. Some say he is faithful to the Prince, but others whose names I'm not knowing will tell you he has an eye to his own affairs."

Rob listened with a flush of indignation upon his face.

"You do him wrong," he blurted out. "The Prince has need to thank him for last night's work, and I'm bound to carry word of it."

He paused abruptly, fearing he had said too much. But Muckle John was apparently intent upon the hillside.

"Look," said he, "they're coming straight for us. Now, Rob, it will be touch and go, and do what I tell you without question, for I know this country like my ain hand; and I tell ye at once that if we are not twenty mile on the other side of them before nightfall, we might as well

cut our ain throats. And, Rob, mind it's you they're after, no me. Should you care to hand anything over for safe keeping, just in case —ye ken—" and he paused, looking over Rob's head.

"That I cannot," said Rob firmly.

"Then follow me," was all the answer Muckle John gave, and putting a huge rock between them and their enemies, they ran swiftly slantwise up the slope until they reached the summit, where for a moment Muckle John looked back. The great half-moon formation of the ascending Highlanders was moving quickly upwards.

"This is no red-coat work," he gasped, "but tartan against tartan, and fox hunting fox," and away they went along the opposite side of the hill, just low enough to miss the sky-line.

As luck would have it that part of the hill was very bare and empty of cover, and ere they had gone half a mile a distant shout warned them that they were seen, and that the whole force of their pursuers was now upon their line of flight.

Rob saw a sudden tightening of Muckle John's mouth, and now it ceased to be a game of hide and seek, but a race for dear life. The pace was terrible. Rob's lungs were bursting with the straining, so that red flashes of light swam before his eyes.

"Quicker!" cried Muckle John, "they are gaining! Oh, can ye no mak' a sprint, Rob—only a hundred yards?"

For a while Rob struggled on, stumbling and gasping, until at last his foot caught in a tuft of heather, and he fell heavily to the ground. Without a word or pause, Muckle John, who was leading by some ten feet, turned swiftly, and picking him up, continued his wild race for the broken rocks that lay before them.

Two hundred yards behind came the foremost Highlanders, leaping over the ground in bounds, their claymores ready in their hands. A minute, and Muckle John had passed among the rocks, then doubling right and left, he sped towards a monstrous boulder, and scrambling up, pulled Rob on top. Now on the back of this boulder lay another great stone poised upon it, and carrying Rob over his shoulder, he clambered up and so to a cleft in the side of the precipice which fronted the hill.

Rob had been too blinded by exhaustion to notice that before them lay what was apparently a cul-de-sac with bare crag on every side, and had he done so he would have realized why the Highlanders had bared their swords. For they were to all appearances in a death-trap.

But Muckle John, wiping his brow with the sleeve of his coat, seemed well enough content, and placing Rob upon the barren cleft, he turned about and looked down upon the scene below. His assailants were gathered about the rock on which he had first sprung, and were debating what course to take. Far behind came the

main body, and still farther away, Ephraim Macaulay.

"Rob," said Muckle John, "have you your wind yet?"

The boy groaned in reply, but struggled to his feet.

"Now," said Muckle John, "I am not the daft fool ye no doubt take me for—there is a way up this cliff only known to me and one other. You see this cleft? It runs for fifty yards in a slanting direction, and there's little enough foothold. There is a break at the corner there and a bit jump of maybe two feet, but no easy, with just a bare rock and six inches to land on. But dinna waver or lose heart, for there's no return and it's certain death to bide here. After that, climb straight up, but leaning to the left, and when ye reach a small tree-stump wait for me, for then it becomes no easy matter."

For a moment Rob hesitated, but Muckle John pushed him gently on the shoulder.

"It's death here," said he again, "for they can go back and reach the top in two hours." Then in a leisurely manner he drew his claymore to hold the rock against assault.

Knowing that if he hesitated he was lost, Rob set foot upon the narrow path that ran along the smooth edge of rock, and never looking down for fear of turning giddy, he wormed his way upwards, feeling every foot of the slippery surface.

A sudden silence fell upon the onlookers below,

and then a harsh noise of voices reached him, and a moment later a stone crashed on the rock within a foot of his head.

"Haud tight, Rob," shouted Muckle John; "dinna mind them!" and whipping out his pistol he fired, shattering the arm of another man who was poised for his aim.

Had any one of them there carried a musket, Rob would have been shot like a crow, but as Muckle John shrewdly guessed, no one of that ragged crew had more than cold steel, though that was ready should the boy falter and fall.

But creeping onward he reached the place where the empty space lay, and without a pause he stepped across, regained his balance and disappeared round the corner. At that a great yell of anger broke out, and a sudden rush was made for the lowest rock, upon which half a dozen men climbed and thence swarmed up within three feet of where Muckle John stood, awaiting them.

At that he swung down upon them, and laying about him with his claymore, cleared the stone and stood looking upon the crowd of his enemies with great good-humour. Growling sullen threats, they fell back out of reach of his deadly sword, and so, setting his back against the crag, he drew out his whistle and, placing the hilt of his claymore between his legs, he broke into a Highland rant.

Now the story of that tune was one peculiarly

obnoxious to the men below, for it was written to commemorate a great clan battle, in which the people of the West had not covered their name with glory. He played it with grim relish, giving it such a sprightly measure, that every note seemed a jeer and a bitter gibe at their kith and kin.

Indeed, so engrossed did he grow with his melody, that he did not notice a man to his left pick up a great stone, and launch it like a flash upon him. Moreover, it was aimed with a deadly purpose, for it took the claymore on the blade and sent it spinning over the edge upon the earth below.

With a cry Muckle John leaped for the cleft. The men below, with a wild shout, swarmed up like hungry wolves upon the place he had abandoned.

And then drawing his pistol and dirk, he fell upon his knees like a wild-cat defending its lair with tooth and claw, and sent the first man hurtling backwards with a bullet in his brain.

"Lochaber pig," he taunted, "it takes a dirk to make you squeal."

"Man without a tartan," they screamed back in Gaelic, "landless—nameless one . . ."

"No name is better than a Lochaber name," he cried with a laugh, driving them back for the third time.

But his position was desperate, for the long blades of his assailants could reach him before

he could reload, and his dirk was useless except at close quarters.

Now beside him there was a rugged boulder of about three feet in diameter, and no sooner had his eye rested on that, than he bent his long arms around it, and pushing it to the edge rolled it over upon the jeering faces within a few feet of his own, and without watching the panic that it caused, he sprang upon the narrow cleft and began to pass along the road that Rob had gone before.

But now things were very different. Below him, a dozen men had stones in their hands—behind him, those who had the courage were already mounting the dead-strewn rock to follow him.

There was for all that a mocking twinkle in Muckle John's eyes, and he whistled a bar of the tune he had played, and so, walking steadily onward, reached the empty space. It was that critical moment that they had selected for their volley of stones, and indeed it would have gone ill with anyone knocked off his balance at such a time.

But this Muckle John realized as much as they, and out of the corner of his eye he had gauged their scheme to a nicety. He made a step forward, therefore, and a very quick fling back, which few could do where there was not room for the feet to stand, ankle to ankle. And as the stones rattled upon the face of the rock

instead of his own, he crossed very coolly and passed on.

Foiled in that plan, they took to aiming at him indiscriminately, and the dull thud upon his side and legs reached Rob up above. Soon a stone cut his face, and he must needs wipe the blood out of his eyes to see his way, which delayed him and brought his pursuers (the few who dared) the nearer.

But he crept on, nevertheless, and at last reached Rob, and supported himself by the little broken tree.

"Oh, Rob, Rob," he gasped, "I nearly spoilt all. Follow me, for they'll turn the corner in a minute. Once let us get back to the top, Rob, and there's no going back," and he looked down upon the heads of their pursuers with a meaning smile.

The last five yards were as hazardous as the rest, and more than once Rob gave himself up for lost. But each time Muckle John steadied him and jested, and whistled a snatch of tune.

At last they scrambled upon level ground, and lay with bleeding fingers and knees and all the strength gone out of them.

Some minutes passed, and from below came the faint shuffling of footsteps. With a groan Rob struggled up and peered over. A dreadful sight faced him. About twenty yards beneath, where one man was forced to climb upon the other's shoulders, the foothold had failed, and

after a momentary, fluttering grasp at the thin grass that grew in patches here and there, a mournful cry went up, and the two bodies slid and tumbled and sped out of sight.

"They're killed!" cried Rob.

Muckle John rose stiffly to his feet.

"I said there were but two who knew the way," he replied, "and one is mysel'," and he stretched himself and began to walk up the slope of the hill.

"Come, Rob," said he, over his shoulder, "they'll be after us now, but we have two hours' start, which, saving the English, should prove sufficient."

Then quite suddenly he stopped in his tracks, and stared with a frown upon the glen below. Drawing Rob forward, he pointed downwards, saying no word.

And Rob said nothing either; there was nothing to say.

All along the valley and up into the hills beyond were scattered tiny white tents, and little figures in red coats moved hither and thither like ants in an open space amongst the heather, while the sun shone and glinted on white flickers of steel.

CHAPTER IX

THE TURN OF THE SCALES

"ROB," said Muckle John, "this is a nice business, for here we are with the wild Cameron country and Arkaig safely behind us, and within a few steps of Glengarry's land, for which we have been struggling for the last four hours and more."

To the south-east of them was Glen-Pean and Glen-Kingie stretching out in solitude. But between them and comparative safety lay the sleeping English tents, and nearing them at every moment were the Camerons and Macaulay. Muckle John shook his head gloomily.

"We canna go back, Rob, and we canna go forward—at least no until nightfall, and then we're like to meet with a bullet."

He lay upon the ground, and chewed a piece of grass, eyeing the English tents with a frown.

"We're as good as lost," said Rob hopelessly.

"Man Rob," replied Muckle John grimly, "ye possess a rare discernment."

With a sigh Rob let him be, and took to thinking about his own desperate affairs. Twice during the past twelve hours he had been on the point of destroying the paper and each time he was thankful that he had waited. But now

they were as good as lost. Captured either by the English or by Macaulay they were doomed for a quick death, and the dispatch would prove a great piece of treasure-trove for either—the map that would show the way to Prince Charlie's gold, with which he could buy ten thousand men to his standard. At least that was how Rob looked at it, and some would say there was some truth in what he believed.

It was the thought of the money falling into such hands that determined him to destroy the map. He stole a glance at Muckle John, but his eyes were fixed steadily on vacancy. Then slipping away, he leaned with his back against a rock, and drew the envelope cautiously from the side of his brogue, where he had concealed it.

It was sealed and addressed to the Prince. Rob had hardly time to glance at it, however, before a warning call from Muckle John made him spring to his feet, the paper still in his hand.

"See, Rob," cried he, but eyeing the piece of paper keenly, "here comes Macaulay from the west, so we must decide on the instant. Once and for the last time, hae ye onything that I can tak' charge of, for it's you they'll search, no me."

Rob felt himself weakening, but again his promise to Cameron withheld him.

"No," he cried, and made as though to tear the paper in two.

"You doited fool!" screamed Muckle John, rushing at his hands.

Rob with quick alarm leaped aside, and the big man tripped and floundered along the ground. What was he to do? But of a sudden he stood still. Why should he doubt Muckle John?

"I've taken your advice," he said, and showed the piece of paper in his hand.

"It's only what seems reasonable," replied Muckle John. "Now put it by, for it's neck or nothing for us, Rob."

"Have you a plan?" asked the boy, with his eyes on the white tents and his heart in a sad state of fright.

"A sort of a plan," he replied, and started at a run rowards the English.

Without a word Rob followed him. There was no time to question such a course, and already Macaulay was within a mile of them. But when he saw them heading for the tents in the glen below he paused, as well he might, for the sight of two Jacobite rebels scampering towards an English camp was sufficiently arresting.

The Highlanders with him, who had no wish for nearer acquaintance with red-coated soldiery, slackened their pace too, and, dropping below the sky-line, became invisible in the heather.

On ran Muckle John, and behind him Rob, until an English sentinel raised his musket and

called to them to halt. The boy glanced anxiously at his compainion's face. But he gathered nothing there. There was certainly no sign of fear.

"Who goes there?" cried the sentry.

Quite quietly Muckle John thrust a hand into his great-coat pocket.

"Here is my passport," he replied, "and this is my guide. I am Captain Strange, on special duty in the west," and he handed over a document to the man, who read it slowly, and then saluting, stood at attention until they had passed.

When they were about twenty yards distant, however, Muckle John spoke in a low voice to Rob.

"Look up the hill," he said, "and tell me if Macaulay is coming down."

But there was no one to be seen, and on learning that, Muckle John gave a great sigh as though he were vastly relieved.

They neared the tents and were walking on, when an officer rose to his feet and stopped them.

"Who are you?" he asked, "and what kind of Highland wild-cat is that?" pointing with the end of his sword at Rob.

"I am Captain Strange," said Muckle John.

"Strange," echoed the man, who seemed a good-humoured fellow, greatly bored with sitting among the hills. "Oh yes, I ken ye

by name, and I am Captain Campbell, at your service. Come and have a crack inside," and he made to enter his tent.

With a momentary hesitation Muckle John followed him, but first of all he took one swift sweeping glance over his shoulder at the hillside.

Then, seating himself within, he fell into conversation, while Rob waited outside the tent, watching the soldiers standing at their posts, or marching up and down amongst the heather.

All the time a curious presentiment of fear grew heavy upon him, which the silent day only intensified.

"I take it you were at Culloden," said Captain Campbell; "that must have been a poorlike affair."

"None so poor," said Muckle John; "where there are starving men and bickering chiefs you don't look for much resistance, but they broke two lines, sir."

"Did they so? It is evident the Argyll men were not in prominence."

"No," replied Muckle John drily, "the Campbells were employed in pulling down walls."

The other eyed him uncertainly. He felt the sting under his words.

"If the business had been left to the Duke," said he, "there would have been no call for levies from the Low Country."

"If it had been left to the Duke," replied Muckle John, "every clan in the north would have made havoc of Argyll."

"You speak strangely, sir—I take it you mean no offence to the Clan Campbell?"

"I," echoed Muckle John, "what have I against them? I am a Lowlander, as my name tells ye; we canna all be born across the Highland line."

"Well, well, Captain Strange, there are braw men on both sides; I take it you are on the trail of the rebel leaders?"

"And who else? But I would as wittingly trap foxes in Badenoch; they disappear like peat reek on a summer's night."

Captain Campbell nodded his head, and taking out a dispatch from his pocket, he drew his stool a shade nearer.

"You come at an opportune time," he said, "for here is a dispatch in which your name appears, and certain secret information is contained for transmission to you."

"Indeed, sir," said Muckle John, all attention.

"It has reached the knowledge of the Duke of Cumberland that certain rebels are concealed about the shores of Arkaig, and amongst them Lord Lovat, who has fled in that direction from Gortuleg House. Two days after Culloden, a party of dragoons surrounded the latter place, but he had gone, carrying his papers with him. He is an old man, and should not evade capture

long. The Duke places the utmost importance on his capture. If Lovat is taken, he is assured all further trouble will simmer out. As long as Lovat lives he will counsel resistance, and that may mean months of service in the hills."

"Are any others mentioned?"

"It is stated that French gold has been landed at a place near Arkaig, and here is a warrant to arrest two rebels who have knowledge of it—one is a boy, Rob Fraser by name, who is acquainted with the hiding-place of Lord Lovat, and the other is—who do you think?"

"Who indeed, sir? Lochiel—Cluny . . .?"

"No, no, who but Muckle John, the most dangerous of them all when mischief is afoot."

"Muckle John? But is he not abroad?"

"Abroad—who ever heard of him abroad when there is a head to crack at home? They say he is wanted on a charge in the Low Countries."

"A dangerous fellow," said Muckle John severely, "and yet there's a kind of quality about the man—a bird of passage, Captain Campbell, and a bonny player on the chanter."

"More a gallows-bird than any other. He'll whistle a thin enough tune when the Duke has finished with him. He lays great stress on his taking, I can tell ye. He can spin a yarn, Captain Strange, that will be worth hearing, I'll be bound. He and that boy, Rob Fraser,

are in company, as desperate a pair as ever skulk in the heather this day."

"I take it there is no saying where they lie?"

The other winked very slyly at that.

"The net is closing," he said, "and once the boy is caught, there is small chance of the other going loose."

In the meantime, Rob was outside, and he wished Muckle John would come. Before them was a weary tramp, and already he was tired. His eyes shut for a moment—then opened and shut again. He took to thinking of his father, and how it fared with Lord Lovat, and so thinking he fell asleep.

His awakening was rude enough, for before he could open his eyes his arms were held behind his back, and he was hoisted roughly to his feet. The officer, good-humoured no longer, was facing him, while half a dozen red-coats shut him off from all chance of escape.

And before him stood Ephraim Macaulay.

"Which of you is Captain Strange?" cried Captain Campbell, very red in the face, and looking back towards his tent as though he awaited an indignant reply from within.

"I am Captain Strange," replied Macaulay stiffly.

"Then where are your papers?"

"They were stolen by the man who came with his boy, who was sleeping outside your tent."

"Be careful of your words, sir. How am I to know that you are what you say?"

"Perhaps you did not trouble to read the particulars on the passport?"

"No, sir—I admit that I did not."

"Then if you had you would have realized that I am not six foot two or thereabouts, or travel with a notorious rebel, such as that boy there. Also that my name is not—Muckle John."

"MUCKLE JOHN!" shouted the officer, "if what you say is true," he cried, and breaking off he started running towards the tent and peered within, then parting the folds, disappeared altogether. But an instant later, he was tearing about the camp like a man gone mad.

"He's made off!" he shouted. "Sound the bugle there, and search the hills!" Then plunging into his tent again, he reappeared with his hat in his hand.

For Muckle John had taken his departure, leaving behind him only a neat hole in the canvas of the tent, on the side farthest from the real Captain Strange, whose reputation as a secret agent in the English service did not warrant for his future safety. For long the soldiers searched, but no sign of Muckle John was discovered, and none had seen him go.

To Rob, however, this was poor comfort, for bound hand and foot and guarded by two soldiers he passed a miserable night, and when morning came he was set between a file of soldiers, and

the march to Fort Augustus commenced, where it was rumoured that the Duke of Cumberland would arrive that day.

It was not till mid-day that his hands were loosed, and then, very cautiously, he searched for the precious paper, knowing that the time for its destruction was come.

His fingers ran cautiously down the side of his brogue. He did so lying on his side, and his legs tucked up under his kilt.

But all in vain, for the paper was gone.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST FLICKER

It is an error to suppose that the Jacobites were ready to surrender all hope of resistance without a last bid for terms, if not for victory. Culloden was lost, but a large body of the clans had not come up in time to engage in the battle. An ignominious flight spelt utter ruin to the chiefs and unquestioned submission to the Government, whereas a stand in the hills was eminently suited to Highland warfare. Cavalry were useless in rough country and southern soldiers easily outwitted and confused.

Had Prince Charles not lost his head in the debâcle of Culloden he might have remained King of the Highlands if not of Scotland itself.

Unfortunately, the strength of the Jacobite army was also its greatest weakness. Quick to mobilize and equipped by centuries of warfare for the field, they were also unaccustomed to a prolonged campaign. The quick fight and the swift retreat, the raid by night and the tireless pursuit were their notion of war. They cared little enough for the rights or wrongs of a quarrel so long as they could kill a man or two, and make home again with a few head of cattle.

For this reason the delay and confusion

following hard upon Culloden played havoc with the Jacobite army. Once their faces were set homewards no power on earth could stop the clans. They were weary of campaigning on scanty fare and small pay. A few short days and the Children of the Mist were gathered into their own mountains and the army had melted into a few scattered remnants waiting for a leader. On the shores of Arkaig a few futile conferences took place, and then followed hard the inevitable dispersion.

Lord Lovat, on whom the chiefs still laid a certain trust, was carried to Muirlaggan, where Lochiel, Glenbucket, Murray of Broughton and others awaited him.

They rose as he was carried into their midst, moved by a kind of reverence for infirm old age.

Murray of Broughton shivering with illness, with flickering agitated eyes, stood tapping with his fingers upon the rough table. He knew Lovat of old, and had suffered at his hands; Lochiel, pale from his wound, looked liked a man more heart-broken than anxious. Of all the Jacobite leaders he was the great gentleman and one whose life and motives were of the purest.

Lord Lovat was perfectly at his ease. He took the head of the table without question, scrutinizing each face from under his shaggy brows unconquered as ever.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I take it ye

have not accepted Culloden day as your *coup de grâce?*"

Lochiel shook his head.

"No, no," he said vacantly, "it is our poor people that we are minded of," at which Murray nodded, avoiding Lovat's stony stare.

"I too, have a clan," said the old man sombrely, "I have never forgotten that. There is also my son."

They had in common courtesy to acknowledge that he was as deeply involved as any.

"It is our duty to prevent Cumberland taking a ruthless vengeance on our people," he continued; "rather than leave them to Hanoverian justice, we should be prepared to die sword in hand."

Murray of Broughton stirred uneasily.

"I fear your lordship does not know how scattered our forces are—the Prince flying for his life—the clans unwilling to mobilize again."

Very slowly Lovat raised his face, and stared Murray down. Then turning to Lochiel he said: "Is that not true?" as though the Prince's secretary had not spoken at all.

"I am ready to sacrifice everything if we can make a stand," replied the chief of the Camerons simply.

"I think your lordship did not catch my meaning," broke in Murray in a fluster.

"I think," corrected Lovat with composure, "I caught it finely."

"Your lordship's pardon if I seem to take a liberty," said Roy Stuart, "but what can we do more than we have done during the last few months? We have been promised French aid —none has come. We have looked for French gold—there has been little enough of that. The English Jacobites have lain like rats in a hole."

"And we—those of us who can run," retorted Lovat, "are like rats without a hole. There are occasions, Mr. Stuart, when even rats can face the cat—and rout him too."

"The Prince has ordered us to disperse," bleated Murray in a flutter of nerves and tepid anger.

"The Prince," barked Lovat, "gave his last order on Culloden Moor. We are done with princes and Irishmen and grand French promises; we are men with everything to lose and something to gain. Maybe your profession, Mr. Murray, or is it your Lowland blood, has made you unacquainted with the lengths that despair may drive a man."

"You are pleased to sneer, sir," blurted out Murray.

"I trust," replied Lovat, in a melancholy undertone, "you may never have a chance to repay the compliment."

"Come, come," broke in Lochiel, "this is no time for contentions. If it is decided that we shall raise the clans we must make speed. I take it that we are of one mind upon that?"

Lovat nodded his head before any could speak.

"Could we but raise a few thousand men," he said, "and we shall show the Duke what Highland warfare may mean. Let us meet again in ten days' time each with his people. Send out the summons, Lochiel. Let the Prince take ship to France if he will—so long as we do not betray each other" (and here he looked hard at Murray) "we are as safe as wild-cats in Argyll."

There was a loud murmur of approval from those about him. Now, as always, Lovat had carried the day. He had come, an old sick man, coughing in his litter, facing a dozen men fairly eaten up with fear and perplexity. In one short hour he had them at his heel. With a body as sound as his mind he would have raised the Highlands himself.

Still Murray of Broughton, that creaking door, must have his word. It was more his habit of mind than any real evil in the man. He was the soul of method, and concise as the Lord President himself. Perhaps he suspected Lovat, as Lovat in all sincerity suspected him. Perhaps he was influenced by such reason as he possessed. It may be that he foresaw what was ordained, and knew Lovat for what he was.

"My lord," he said in his hesitating voice, "I have little influence here—I have no people to consider—I am not a soldier, only a man of business who has tried to serve the cause."

They waited while Lovat watched him as a snake watches a rabbit.

"Supposing, my lord, that the clans are persuaded to rise again, what kind of campaign can you carry on? Where can you obtain your supplies, your ammunition, or money to pay our troops? Already the coast is patrolled—the Highlands surrounded and the roads to the south cut off—what kind of mercy will the isolated places receive—the very places where you hope to obtain provisions? They will so harry the country, my lord, to starve you out that the very sight of women and children coming to you in the direst starvation will make you regret this step. It is starvation, and not defeat, will give you your answer, my lord."

"There's truth in what he says," murmured a man behind Lochiel.

"Mr. Murray," said Lovat, "I doubt not you speak with sincerity, but this is a matter on which we must take our own counsel. Look to your own safety, Mr. Murray, and no gentleman here will say you acted unbecomingly."

It had become a contest between these two—Lovat forcing the pace to save his neck, and Murray, knowing what was behind it all, struggling, who can say why, to dissuade them from further bloodshed.

He moistened his lips and played his last card.

"As you will, gentlemen," he said suavely,

"It is for you to decide. But as a man of business, since your lordship has discounted any finer qualities in me, might I suggest that perhaps a memorandum of this meeting, a pledge to bind us together, would give adhesion to such a proposal. It is only natural, and in desperate straits where all must live or fall together, a prudent course to take."

Lovat gripped the edge of the table with his hands. This was a blow indeed. His face changed colour. He seemed for a moment to quiver as though he were icy cold, his head commencing to shake from side to side.

"I agree to that entirely," said Lochiel.

"No, no," came from Lovat in a whisper.

Murray watched him with all the relish of a weak man scoring a rare triumph.

"Did your lordship speak?" he asked.

"I did," said Lovat, rising to his strength again, "I see nothing but danger and needless formality in such proceedings. We are not men of business, Mr. Murray—we are Highland gentlemen."

It was a bold throw, but it won the hearts of many there, who hated Murray and his fiddling Lowland ways. Only Lochiel said nothing, swayed two ways at once, and ready to faint with the pain of his wound.

"I think," broke in Roy Stuart, "we should defer signing until we meet again."

"Bravely spoken," remarked Lovat, "let

us meet with our men in ten days' time. I can promise three hundred Frasers, if not more."

They all rose at that and conferred together before parting, each one promising a regiment, and that word should go through the hills.

Only Murray stood alone, and only Murray saw a man enter with a package and hand it to Lovat. He watched the old man open it—he noted how he started and frowned. More than that, he read the sudden terror in his face.

"Bring that man back!" cried the Fraser, but none heard him (save Murray), and when he learned at last that the messenger was nowhere to be found he groaned and a kind of despair settled upon his face like a mask.

But the thing that puzzled Murray was the nature of the package. For it held no paper (that he could see) but only a strip of Fraser tartan, and that very stained in one corner like the discoloration of blood.

CHAPTER XI

A NARROW ESCAPE

Now when Muckle John had heard the voice of Macaulay—or, to give him his real name, Captain Strange—approaching the tent, he had moved ever so slightly backward and loosened his dirk. The inevitable had happened, and he had played with fire too long. And so, when the officer hurried out to meet the new arrival, he did a number of things very quickly.

But the first was the cutting of the canvas farthest from the entrance. Then with a dive he was through, and with the tent between him and his enemies.

To the right of him, about a hundred yards distant, was a sentry, standing with his back turned, looking towards the hill opposite. On his left again were a group of red-coats off duty and playing cards.

To cross the open space and reach the slope unseen would seem impossible, and yet Muckle John did it, and what is more, took two hours about it, which in a period of acute danger might seem leisurely travelling.

What his quick eyes fell upon first was a horse grazing thirty yards away. But that he put out of his mind as too hazardous a risk.

About half that distance away, however, a tussock of hay was lying—a loosely bound pile about eight feet long and four broad.

When Muckle John saw that he breathed again, and taking off his hat, he hurled it in the direction of the hay, then waited patiently. Fortunately, no one saw it skim into the air and drop upon the ground.

By this time Strange had roused the officer's indignation and then his alarm. He did exactly what any ordinary man would have done in the circumstances. He dashed into the tent—he saw the tear and peered quickly through it. But Muckle John was round the flap and unseen. Then, realizing that his late guest had bolted, he darted through the door of the tent again, and bawled the order to arms.

At that Muckle John moved like lightning. He did not dash for the tussock of hay; he knew that such an obvious place of refuge would attract them first. He quite softly re-entered the tent through the slit, and, crawling under the bedding on the floor, he watched the scurrying soldiers outside with keen and calculating eyes.

Half a dozen, headed by Campbell, charged the hay and turned it over and over. Then Strange, not satisfied with that, drove his sword into the midst of it, and poked and jabbed with extraordinary determination, at which Muckle John smiled and lay still. He had

not to wait long, however, for the inevitable discovery of his hat sent them post-haste towards the heather and the rough country beyond, and saved a closer search nearer home, which was just what Muckle John had feared and planned to prevent.

Away went the soldiers with Strange and the little red-faced officer, and the camp, saving the sentries, was clear.

So the first onward move commenced. With a spring, Muckle John was through the slit, and darting over the intervening space, he reached the mangled tussock of hay and crawled beneath it. A rope bound it loosely together. Slipping between this and the hay, and trusting to luck that his boots were hid, he began to move in inches over the ground.

By the time the first soldiers passed wearily and footsore into camp, too hot and tired for further searching, he had covered twenty yards.

After them came Strange and the officer, deep in talk. They tramped past and all was quiet again. And then, to his profound dismay, two soldiers, late-comers from the pursuit, sank down upon the hay, and prepared to rest themselves.

"Uncommon 'ard this 'ay," said one of them.

"That it be, Silas—but likewise uncommon soft after 'eather," and one of them yawned and loosened his jacket.

"What wilt do with the youngster, think ye?" asked one.

"Shoot 'im at Fort Augustus," replied the other. "Heard Captain say as 'ow we march there to-morrow. Seems cruel t'shoot a mere shaver, Silas."

"It's not as if 'e was a Christian, belike, but only an 'Ighlander," replied Silas.

"That be so," answered the other, apparently reassured.

To Muckle John the information was of interest. But for the moment he was more anxious about the future.

Fortunately, the short afternoon was closing in, and a cold spring wind came blowing off the snow-topped hills. It set the soldiers shivering and stumbling campwards. It also set Muckle John free and travelling slowly towards the rough land at the foot of the slope.

And then he thrust his head through the hay, like a tortoise out of its shell, and looked about him.

To his right stood a sentry, apparently dozing, To his left, another sentry, but marching to and fro to keep warm. Very patiently Muckle John waited for several things to happen. It was inevitable that darkness would fall soon, and that meant safety. It was also very probable that the increasing cold would send both sentries tramping up and down, and in that lay a chance to escape into the heather unseen

But against these two probabilities was the stern fact that horses need fodder, and that every minute brought the search for the tussock of hay nearer.

Had Muckle John been the kind of man who, having exercised a maximum of caution, takes a minimum of risk through a very proper spirit, he would have made a run for it, and dodging the sentries' bullets, trusted to the twilight to cover his flight.

But Muckle John had a certain pride in these episodes. He liked to complete a piece of work like this—to leave at his own good pleasure; above all, not to give his enemies the empty satisfaction of knowing just how he had managed it. At that moment the sentry who dozed dropped his musket, and, hastily picking it up, tramped heavily up and down like his companion. There was just a space of five seconds exactly when both their heads were turned away from him.

Five times Muckle John tested it, leaving half a second for accidents and the half-turns at the corners.

Then drawing himself clear of the hay, he waited, crouching on his hands and knees. At last with a spring, he cleared the danger-spot, and was flat with the heather when the sentries turned again.

The next five seconds saw him thirty yards away, the next another forty, and then he fell to running with bent back—a shadow among

shadows, until he was gathered into the darkness and was seen no more.

It was on the evening of the next day that Muckle John, travelling all night and resting by day, reached Inverness, and, muffling up his face, trod through the silent town and knocked at the door of Miss Macpherson. Inside all was utterly quiet, and for a moment he feared that she had gone.

But very slowly the door opened, and a pair of keen eyes looked into his face, while a nose like an eagle's beak was thrust forward as though on the point of striking.

"Wha's there?" she cried.

"Mistress Macpherson," said Muckle John; "let me in, for I am spent, and this is no the place to exchange pleasantries. . . "

"Pleasantries indeed," she snorted. "Nothing was farther frae my mind," but she let him in for all that, and bolted the door.

Then, raising the rush-light, she stared into his face.

"Oh!" she cried, "and I thought so. Good evening, Mr. Muckle John, though no sae muckle in spirit as when last we met."

"No, madam—ye say true," he replied frowning at the fire-light.

"Tell me," said she, "before we go farther—what of Rob, the obstinate, dour body?"

Muckle John shifted his eyes.

"Maybe he's no been as fortunate as we could have wished," he said, slowly shaking his head.

"Dinna clash words wi' me!" she screamed. "Oot with it, ye Hieland cateran—what o' Rob—where is he—is he in prison?"

"No, no," cried Muckle John, "though maybe no so far off, either."

The hawk eyes were now fixed fiercely on him.

"What did ye come here for?" she cried. "What has kept your feet hammering the road for hours past? Was it just for the pleasure o' a crack wi' me? Oh, no, my man, there's a bonny tale behind your face," and she sat herself down, her chin resting on her hand.

With a shrug Muckle John told of the flight from Culloden (saying nothing of his part that day), and of the meeting on the shore of Arkaig, and the taking of Rob.

"He is meddling in business that I canna control," he said finally, "and so he's bound for Fort Augustus, and out of it he must come or my name's no Muckle John."

"Which is probably true," sniffed Miss Macpherson, "and no sae comforting as maybe ye intended."

He gloomed at her a moment without speaking.

"Mistress Macpherson," he said at last, "listen to me. When Rob is brought up in Fort Augustus, your friend Ephraim Macaulay, whose real name is Captain Strange and a

notorious spy, will seek to prove that he was in arms at Culloden. They must prove that, to put the fear of death on him for reasons best left unsaid. Who will know Rob better than yersel', and who will come to the mind of Strange mair clearly? Should he be asked to travel south, be prepared in advance, for it rests wi' you whether Rob goes free or not."

"I always suspected yon Macaulay," remarked Miss Macpherson, "and his Scots was no what I call sound Edinburgh."

"He has muckle strings to his bow, and who can say what arrow may bring doon Rob? But when the message comes, Mistress Macpherson, dinna deny that ye ken Rob, for that will prove his guilt at once, for ithers can be found who will jump at the chance o' pleasing Strange. Mak' a lot of him, and when ye say good-bye to him in his cell, hand the man on guard a piece of siller, and shut the door. There is one I ken in the fort will be glad to do me a favour, and he will put Rob in one of the rooms overlooking the outer court."

"Go on, my man," said she; "I'm no slow in the uptak."

With a reddened face, Muckle John unloosened his jacket.

"Here," said he, "are one or two things that may serve our purpose," and he showed her a coil of slender rope, a file, a pistol, and a skian-dhu.

"They're a bonny lot," said she, "but I'm no just catching their connexion wi' mysel'."

"Mistress Macpherson," said Muckle John, growing still redder in the face, "if ye could see your way to coiling this rope about your waist and concealing the other things, I think Rob is as good as safe."

For long she sat silent.

"Sir," she said, "I believe you are an honest man, though I was positive ye were a rogue until this very minute."

The face of Muckle John was, for once, a medley of expressions, with that of irritation uppermost.

"I hope so," he replied shortly, "but I'm no perfect, ye ken."

"Why do ye want Rob out so much? He is no kin o' yours?"

He uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"What matter," he cried irritably. "Should I save his neck, is not that enough? Maybe I have an affection for the boy. Maybe it is because we are fellow-sufferers in the Cause."

"And maybe," broke in Miss Macpherson, "it is none of these good reasons at all."

To which he answered nothing, but seemed on the point of bursting into a violent rage, and then he fell back on silence, as though he were bitterly offended.

"Mistress Macpherson," he said stiffly, "one thing I can swear to, and that is that I mean

Rob no ill ; and this I promise you : that if you do as I ask, I will answer for his ultimate escape and safety," and, whipping out his bared dirk, he prepared to take the oath.

" Whisht," said Miss Macpherson, " dinna behave like a play-actor ; I'll do what you want, and gladly, for his mither's sake, puir woman. But ye said there is an outer courtyard. How will Rob manage to get over that ? "

" He will not need to do so," said Muckle John, and rose to his feet.

Footsteps suddenly sounded on the street without. A loud knock came at the door—then another, and the noise of a horse's impatient hoofs thumped and clattered on the cobbles.

Like a vast shadow, Muckle John passed silently inside the other room, while Miss Macpherson drew back the bolts

In the street was a trooper, holding a package in his hand.

" For Mistress Macpherson," said he, " from Captain Strange, now stationed at Fort Augustus," and, mounting again, he walked slowly up the street.

Inside, she tore open the paper. It requested her to travel to Fort Augustus at dawn.

Muckle John read what it was at a glance.

Then, gathering up his coat, he bowed, and, meeting her eyes for a moment, passed into the darkness of the street and was gone.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE HANDS OF THE DUKE

To Rob the world had suddenly fallen very hopeless and forlorn. By no conspiracy of Fate could matters have worked out more to his undoing. The precious paper entrusted to him by Dr. Cameron, full of he knew not what vital news and directions regarding the hidden treasure, had been stolen, but worse still by an unknown hand. It is comforting in a dreary way to know who has played the thief. But Rob had not even that poor satisfaction.

He had been taken asleep, and between that time and the journey to Fort Augustus the paper had mysteriously vanished. A horrible thought presented itself. Was it taken from him before he was bound by the soldiers? Muckle John had disappeared without a word or an effort to save him. He had half-heartedly hoped for a rescue on the road, but no sign of living soul had met his eyes.

And at last, at sunset, they had reached the Fort, and he was conducted to a guard-room and there left to his own thoughts.

Suddenly the door opened softly and the angular form of Captain Strange slid into the

room. Rob started to his feet and waited in silence for him to speak.

But that Strange seemed in no hurry to do. Instead, he took to walking slowly up and down the room with his hands coiled behind his back and his chin sunk upon his chest.

Then, "Rob," said he, "what did I tell ye in Inverness?"

To which he received no reply. Rob had the rare gift of silence.

"Did I no tell ye that a gibbet was like enough to watch your capers before very long? Maybe ye've no seen a man hanged by the neck, Rob. It's no a bonny sight, say what you will; and in my way of thinking, no a pleasant prospect for onybody, least of all for a lad of spirit like yersel', Rob, for I'll no deny I admire your pluck," and he breathed heavily and stared out of the window.

"Did you come to talk about hanging?" asked Rob, struggling to speak with composure.

"In passing, Rob—merely in passing. It is a subject that fascinates me, I'll no deny. Come here a minute; ye can see the hanging-tree against the sky-line. It's a rare poseetion, Rob—there'll be nane will pass this way but will ask 'Who's dangling there?' and they'll learn it was Rob Fraser, executed for meddling with what didna concern him. It's a braw fool ye'll look, then, Rob—no great rebel dying

for his principles, but just a silly laddie who ran a big risk for other people's dirty profit."

"You can call it what you will," cried Rob, stung to anger, and paused.

"Say your say, Rob; dinna be afraid," encouraged Strange softly.

Rob shut his lips seeing there was a trap being laid for him.

Perceiving that he would not speak, the other frowned a moment, then with an appearance of kindly sympathy he patted him upon the shoulder.

"Forget my foolish havers," he said. "I was only warning you for your ain good, for it's a dangerous game you're playing, Rob, and a game that you are playing in the dark. Will ye hear me out and say if what I'm telling ye is no true," and he drew a stool near to the boy.

"Let me run over your movements for the last week or so," he went on. "After Culloden—and ye mind I did my best to save ye that night in Inverness—you came to Lovat's country, and thence down to Arkaig. There you met Cameron and buried the gold. There also you escaped out of our hands, and I'll grant no so clumsily, though you were not to blame for that. Then, accompanied by the desperate man ye ken as Muckle John, you made to the north and were captured yesterday in Captain Campbell's camp. Now, Rob, is that no the truth?"

"It is," said Rob, "though what you have

to say against Muckle John should be kept for his own ear. It is wasted on mine."

"Brawly said, Rob, but what do ye ken o' this Muckle John? However, that can keep. I'd wager ye'd turn white did ye ken who Muckle John really is. But when you left Cameron you had a paper, Rob. Supposing that paper fell into our hands, Rob, or those of the Duke, what would happen, think ye? There would be no gold for your Prince, and from the information in the letter—supposing there should be any, which I am assured there is—there would be such a clearing of Jacobites, including the Pretender, as would end their cause for ever. That is, I repeat, supposing such a paper fell into the hands of the Duke. But there are those, Rob, who are Scotch after all, and no verra partial to such measures. There are mony, Rob, who do nane so badly oot of your Jacobite friends, and it's poor shooting where there's no game," and he smiled very knowingly, baring his teeth like a fox.

Rob was puzzled by the note of suggestion in his speech. Had Strange the map or not? If not, had Muckle John taken it? If Strange had it what was to be gained by such words? Would he not take it to the Duke at once?

He glanced quickly at the man facing him. In his eyes he read avarice, cruelty, and cunning.

"If I hand you the paper," said Rob, "what

do you propose to do? Would you give it to the Duke?"

Strange checked a smile.

"That depends," said he, "for between ourselves, where the eagle feeds there's poor pickings for the other birds. The truth is, Rob, there are some things you could tell me, and in return I'd do a deal more for you, for I am no an ungenerous man, and it's a dreary prospect, the gibbet."

"It is all that," rejoined Rob, "but I cannot promise until I hear what you want to know."

"That's mair reasonable, Rob—I knew ye were not the foolish ninny that they took ye for. Now listen, Rob; if you will disclose the hiding-place of Lovat and Archibald Cameron, and help us to lay Muckle John by the heels—in return I will see that you are free this very night, and mair, I will no forget ye when the treasure is come to light o' day."

Rob turned sick at the words, but to learn more he simulated interest and nodded his head doubtfully.

"But the Prince," said he.

"In return for Lovat I will spare the Prince."

"You?"

"Who else, for if you consent none but I will ever see the document and its particulars."

"And you will keep the gold?"

Strange winked at that.

"We two, Rob," said he with a smile.

Then Rob, knowing all and realizing that Muckle John must have the dispatch, rose to his feet.

"Whether I have been a scapegoat or not," he said, "I have only myself to blame; and let me tell you at once, Captain Strange or Macaulay, or whatever your dirty name may be, that nothing can save me from the hangman's noose; neither you with all your promises nor anything else, for I have not the paper you want," and he waited for the storm to burst.

But the smile never died from the other's lips.

"Weel I know that, Rob," said he, "for I have it safe here," and he drew the package, still sealed, from his coat pocket.

With a cry of rage Rob rushed at him, but the chains about his legs tripped him up, and Strange, stepping aside with a snarl, took him by the shoulder and flung him violently to the other end of the room.

"Down!" he cried, "or I will pistol you." In a grim silence he thrust the package back into his pocket.

"Ye see, I hold the cards," he said in a malignant voice. "And now is it to be a dislocated neck and your dead body the prey of corbies—or the salvation of your Prince, a share in the gold, and the taking of Lovat, which is inevitable in any case, and that of Cameron, which is only a question of time? Neither will suffer the extreme penalty, for Lovat is an old

man who has sat at home, and Cameron is a doctor and was no at Culloden at all. As for Muckle John, I will tell ye why he made such a lot o' ye."

"No, no!" cried Rob.

"Whisht! Dinna take on so. Once a blind fool and never again, surely. But did ye think Muckle John risked his life just for love o' ye, Rob? Heaven preserve us—he was after . . ."

"I know," said Rob, "but say no more. I'll tell the Duke you have the paper and throw myself on his mercy."

Strange uttered a shrill cackle of laughter.

"Tell the Duke, Rob! Oh, that's fine hearing. Mercy! It's little mercy ye'll get frae him. No, no! I'll hand it him myself, thank ye. Perhaps ye thought I was like your Muckle John, and playing for my ain hand. You're uncommon green, Rob, but Jerry Strange is no taken so doucely. Jerry is honest as the day, Rob—so come along and see me hand it into the Duke's royal fingers. It'll mak' gran' hearing, Rob, and there'll be sair confusion amongst the rebels now," and flinging open the door he drew his prisoner with him into the passage.

Into a lofty room they went—the chains clanking about Rob's legs very dismally.

A short, red-faced, stout young man of about twenty-five was sitting at a table reading dispatches. He was dressed in a red coat, with stars upon his breast and much gold cord. He

wore a white peruke, and had a choleric, somewhat peevish countenance and a hard blue eye. There was nothing romantic or attractive in his commonplace features or sturdy, clumsy figure. His countenance displayed neither humour nor kindliness, and certainly not beauty—but only determination, courage, and common sense in abundance. It would have been difficult, indeed, to have laid hands on a young man so different in every way from his rival Charles Edward. It almost seemed that Justice had given him victory to compensate him for the odium of his personality.

"Vell, Strange," said he, speaking with a thick German accent, "what is it?"

"Your Highness," replied Strange, "I have here a notorious rebel, though young as ye see. But he was carrying a package which Archibald Cameron handed to him on the shores of Arkaig to deliver to the Pretender. I have reasons for believing, your Highness, that it contains not only a plan of where the treasure be hid, but also the place of concealment of the Prince and the movements of the Jacobites still at liberty. We have followed him according to our instructions."

The Duke of Cumberland stared at Rob, then leapt to his feet.

"Goot, Strange," said he, smacking his lips audibly, "you are a vonder. You vill not be forgotten, my man," and he ripped open the seal and unwrapped the paper.

Rob could see that there was more paper than he had thought. But what made his heart bound with sudden hope was the bewildered expression upon the Duke's face.

"Is zis a joke, Strange?" he shouted, at last, flinging a sheaf of papers upon the floor. "Those," said he in a white heat of fury, "are accounts of charges for drugs. And zis," he added in a roar of anger, holding a scrap with the tips of his fingers, "has ze impertinence to say 'this is no ze goose that laid ze golden egg.'"

In the utter silence Rob laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks. And all the time Cumberland glared at Strange, and the latter stood with an utterly vacant expression, as though he had opened his mouth to say something and then clean forgotten what it was.

Suddenly the Duke turned with a scream of fury upon Rob.

"To-morrow," he cried, his face livid with passion, "ve vill see 'ow you laugh on the gibbet," and he stormed on Strange to go, turning his back upon them both.

But Rob did not move.

"On what charge am I condemned?" he asked.

The Duke switched round.

"Charge!" he cried, and then paused. "Strange, what is the charge?" he asked, stamping his foot.

"It was for carrying treasonable matter," replied Strange in a husky voice; "but I suppose . . ."

"There was nothing against the throne in the package," broke in Rob.

"Strange," shouted the Duke, "am I to wrangle with a school boy? Is 'e not a rebel?"

"He is, your Highness. He was in arms at Culloden."

"Zen surely that is enough to 'ang any man."

"You have no witnesses," retorted Rob.

"Zen find vitnesses. Himmel!—make vitnesses!" broke out the Duke, seating himself again at the table. "But go, Strange, before I burst—and 'old—come back in half an hour. I would talk with you over this and other matters."

In his cell Rob could have wept for joy had he been given to that sort of thing. For he realized that though he had been the goose who had drawn off the pursuit from Cameron, the Prince was safe, and that the gold would yet be his.

In this elation of feeling he crossed slowly to the window. The last rays of the sun were falling upon the blank bars of the gibbet, at which he felt his heart sink, for it was a cold and melancholy ending to his ambitions and his life.

. . . . .

A quarter of an hour later a trooper clattered out of the courtyard of Fort Augustus, bound for Inverness and Miss Macpherson; and in due course Captain Strange knocked upon the door of the Duke's room and entered. In the intervening hour the latter had dined, and appeared somewhat mollified in temper.

Indeed, there were those who said the Duke of Cumberland was genial enough at heart, and though a hard man, one with a sense of justice and honour. He has had few kindly words and many harsh ones, and there is a saying that there is good in every man. As a German prince he had no sympathy with the Jacobites. To him they were savage rebels speaking a barbarous language and wearing a barbarous dress, about whom he knew nothing except the misrepresentations that were current in England.

"Oh, Strange, Strange," he laughed, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, "who is ze goose now, and where are ze golden eggs?"

"Your Highness," said Strange flushing, "it is humiliating, I'll allow, but I must tell you that I was mair than unfortunate, being bound hand and foot by Cameron and no knowing just what had taken place. Cameron made good his escape, for my men were of his ain clan and not anxious to bring dishonour on their name if another would do as well. That he foresaw, I'll be bound, and so he sent this boy at a run

with a package, and the presence o' Muckle John lent him additional importance."

"Oh, vell," said the Duke, "but ve must bring the boy to his senses, Strange. Produce your vitnesses, and he'll show us things, I'll be bound. Vot does he know, Strange? Can he tell us anyting?"

"He knows where Lovat is hid, your Highness, and ye ken what his capture will mean. It will show the rebels we have long arms."

"True—but vill he tell, Strange?"

"A week or two by himsel' will work wonders, your Highness, once he knows we can hang him."

"And Muckle John?"

Strange bit his lip.

"Would I could have taken him," he said bitterly.

"Your chance vill come, Strange. Ze net is closing. Soon ve vill 'ave ze Pretender, and zen all ze smaller fry vill be caught too—" he yawned and pushed back his chair—"I am sick to death of zis country," he said; "it is always rain, rain, rain, and nosings to eat or drink."

And so Strange left him looking gloomily out of the window upon the black Highland hills.

CHAPTER XIII

MISS MACPHERSON COMES TO FORT AUGUSTUS

DAWN found Rob watching at the window. Into the night his eyes had stared until the cold wind before the grey light of day fell upon his face. Vast forms moved dimly into sight. Hills stood up gradually against the ashen sky. Trees formed in vague, black columns, with their trunks half hidden in mist.

Suddenly a faint, pink glow flushed the pearly grey with colour, and in an instant the valley grew distinct. The sun rose and sent the dew glistening like a thousand twinkling diamonds, then, passing higher, flooded the Fort with yellow light, and threw the black shadow of the gallows-tree upon the ground.

With a sigh, Rob turned and seated himself upon his bed, waiting for the end.

But hours passed and no one came. He heard the sharp words of command from the drilling-square below, and the grounding of arms as the soldiers stood at attention. Outside, a man whistled cheerfully, and that reminded him of Muckle John. Surely he would not desert him! Did he not pride himself on always finding a way? Rob remembered, with a wry smile, that the only way he had found two days

before had been for himself. He took to wondering what Cameron would say when he heard (if he should ever hear, which was not so likely) how ill his joke had treated his messenger. He took a doleful satisfaction in imagining him greatly disturbed at having sent him to his death.

At that moment footsteps sounded along the corridor, and the key of the door was turned.

Into the room stepped Captain Strange.

"Poor Rob," he said with a grin, "you're like a ghost. No used your bed? Come, come, I thought better of you than that. Not afraid, are you, Rob?"

"If I were afraid I would do what you want, but you will never have that satisfaction."

"Never is a strong word, Rob. I would not use that word to the Duke, boy . . ."

"He can hang me, but it will be without a fair trial."

Strange leaned his arm upon the window ledge.

"Wrong again; there will be a fair trial, Rob," he said without turning his head, "and that this very day. It is more than many another has had—and that's the truth."

"What can you prove against me?"

"I have a witness, Rob, who will tell us all about you. What do you say to that?"

"That you lie."

Strange switched about, and his face hardened.

"Come then," he cried angrily, and led the way from the room.

With a sudden foreboding of danger Rob rose, and the door clanged behind him. If, in a single night, they had found a witness his doom was complete. And yet, what witness could they have discovered?

Down to the great place where they had gone the preceding night Strange took him. Outside the door stood two soldiers with muskets. Passing between them, the heavy door shut silently behind. Facing Rob sat the Duke of Cumberland, alone.

Hastily he looked round the room. No other person, witness or otherwise, was to be seen.

"Prisoner," rasped out the Duke, "are you villing to give us informations regarding certain rebels?"

"I am not," said Rob.

"Zen vot prevents us from hanging you?"

"On what charge?"

"As a rebel."

"You know nothing against me," said Rob, gaining courage.

"But we 'ave a vitness who does," said the Duke.

Then rising, he opened a little door that lay behind his chair, and stood to one side to let some one pass into the room.

And very slowly, her head in the air, came Miss Macpherson. Rob felt his heart give a

great thump, and then he grew cold as ice, for he knew, whether she wished to harm him or no, that his aunt was bound to recognize him.

Strange advanced to meet her.

"Mistress Macpherson," he said, "you remember me?"

"Aye," she replied drily, "I know ye fine, though we met last in more reputable circumstances."

"Alas!" he smiled, "duty is a hard master."

The Duke burst in at that.

"Madam," he cried, "ees zis boy known to you or nod?"

"Your Highness," she replied, looking Rob squarely in the eyes, "this is my wretched nephew."

With a bitter look of mortification and fury, Rob turned his back on them.

"Vas 'e in arms against ze throne?" asked the Duke.

"He was all that," she replied grimly, and Strange rubbed his hands with joy. This was beyond all expectation.

"But, madam," went on the Duke, "you know vot zis means." He was evidently puzzled by her equanimity.

"Thrawn necks are too common at present to be overlooked," she replied drily.

He nodded, understanding her dimly.

"Zen dere is noding more to be said," he

remarked, and said something in Strange's ear, who touching Rob upon the shoulder led him away to his cell, where he was left to his own dismal thoughts.

Returning, Strange begged Miss Macpherson to be seated, and again whispered into the Duke's ear, who nodded from time to time, and smiled sleepily.

"As you vill, Strange," he said, and rising, withdrew.

"Now, Miss Macpherson," began Strange when they were alone, "I knew I could rely upon you to put even the claims of relationship aside, when it was a question of loyalty."

"Go on, my man," said she impatiently; "I'm no here to listen to patriotic sentiments."

"Exactly. Now this is how the matter stands. Rob is convicted as a rebel, and there's only one solution to that. We agreed from the start that he was fated for a quick finish. But he's young, Miss Macpherson, and your own blood."

"No blood of mine," she said sharply. "What my poor sister did is no affair of mine."

"At any rate, it would not look well for you to have led to the lad's death."

Miss Macpherson's lips tightened, but she said nothing.

"And there are ways and means. All this fuss over a boy is not according to reason, much less the Duke's usual procedure. But Rob knows

some things that his Highness is ready to hear in exchange for his life. More than that, he will deal generously with him."

"What things?" asked Miss Macpherson, shortly.

"Where Lovat hides, for instance. And, mark you, it will make no difference in the end. In a fortnight's time we shall drive the upper end of Loch Arkaig, where we hear he is concealed. But we are not sure, and a word from Rob would help us. That is hardly treachery, Miss Macpherson, is it?"

"I never had a legal head," she replied, with an utterly expressionless countenance.

Strange rose, and walked twice up and down the room.

"Persuade Rob to act reasonably," he went on, "and you will have his ultimate gratitude, and, what is more, that of the Duke as well. Will you help us?"

"I'll see Rob," she replied.

"Thank you . . ."

"But only on two conditions."

"Yes?"

"That I see him alone, and that he has a fair week to think it over."

Strange hesitated.

"Your first condition is, of course, simple," he replied, "but the second is more difficult." And he hurried from the room.

In a minute or two he returned.

"The Duke agrees," he said; "and now, please, follow me."

They passed through the corridor up the stairs. Then, opening the door of Rob's cell, Strange bowed her in, and, closing it, turned the key. Rob was lying face downwards upon the bed; he never lifted his head as she entered, and so she paused and listened at the keyhole until the footsteps had died away.

Then, "Rob," she called, and fell upon her knees by the bedside.

He raised his face and looked at her with sullen anger.

"What do you want with me?" he asked.

But for answer she placed her finger on her lips, and drew a file and pistol from her pocket.

"Hide them," she whispered. When he had done so, in a dream, and turned his head, a coil of rope was lying on the ground, and his aunt was rebuttoning her coat.

"Tak' it, Rob," she said. "Wake up, lad."

Suddenly hope sprang to his eyes. With a leap he was off the bed, and the rope was below the hay upon which he lay.

"Oh, aunt," he said, "I did not understand."

"Tuts," she replied. "Now, hark ye, Rob, for there's muckle to grasp. Yon Muckle John came to me last night, and sent me here with the things ye have. He also sent this letter," and she fumbled for a moment in her pocket, and handed over a slip of paper to him.

"Read it by-and-by," she said, "but first listen here. They will no hang ye for a week—hat's sure as death, and it's yon old Lovat that they are after. They will search upper Loch Arkaig in a fortnight, but they would do it sooner were they to ken just what you know. Belike, Rob, if ye told them ye would win free, and in the meantime the word could reach Lovat to seek another place."

"No," said Rob, "that I could not do. Suppose he were too ill to escape, or the message strayed?"

"Then, Rob, there is Muckle John, and he has a way, he says, though I canna believe in it mysel'. But the letter from him will show you."

Rob drew the paper out, and read it in silence. It ran:

"DEAR ROB,—When ye hear a whustle such as ye ken, do as I say. File through the bars of your window and your chains should you have any and lower yoursel down into the outer yard where a cart with hay will be lying. When dawn breaks the cart will move out but it will not be searched for reasons that I will not say. Should ye have anything to entrust to me in case of accident give it to Mistress Macpherson, who is our good friend."—M. J.

It was the last sentence that sent the blood into Rob's cheeks.

"Do you know why Muckle John is so anxious regarding my safety?" he asked his aunt.

"No," she replied with a troubled frown, "though I asked him."

"Did he reply?"

"Not he, but he was sair put about."

Rob went over to the window, and laid his head upon his arm. A deep despondency had suddenly fallen upon him. That Muckle John was only interested in the suppositious plan of the treasure seemed only too apparent. It was to obtain this that he schemed and planned. His own safety and life were trifles in comparison. Enemies within and enemies without, and all fashed about a plan that did not exist.

A sudden determination came to him.

Taking a pencil from his pocket, he took up Muckle John's letter, tore off the part which contained the reference to the treasure and wrote upon the back:

"This to tell you that what you seek has fallen into the hands of the Duke."

Then folding it up, he handed it to his aunt.

"Give that to Muckle John," he said.

Miss Macpherson scrutinized his face closely.

"Rob," she asked, "ye will do what the letter tells ye? This is no enviable position for any Highland woman, Rob, and I took for granted that no false pride would prevent you from making good your escape."

"I have not refused," he replied.

A look of relief sprang into her face.

"Then good-bye," she said with unusual warmth.

For a moment they stood hand in hand, and then she knocked upon the locked door, and waited for Strange to come.

When it fell back, she passed from sight without a backward glance.

For long Rob paced up and down the room.

But of a sudden he stopped, and, uttering a sharp cry, rushed half-way to the door. For long he shouted, banging with his fists upon the wood. It was too late.

That Lovat would be discovered had suddenly forced itself upon him, and that he would be regarded as his betrayer would naturally follow. For now, through his own foolish pride, he had thrown away the only chance of saving the old man, by rejecting the help of Muckle John.

CHAPTER XIV

MUCKLE JOHN SHOWS HIS HAND

MISS MACPHERSON, saying good-bye to Captain Strange, and acquainting him of Rob's present obstinacy, but bidding him not to despair, took her way through the porter's gates, and turned her horse's head towards the north. After travelling in a leisurely manner for some six miles, she drew in her beast, and dismounting led him into a small coppice upon the hill-side.

All around her lay the lifeless stretches of heather and grey crag. Near her side gurgled a little stream passing through the trees and down the vacant, wine-red moor. Behind her the stark, open slope of brae, around her the huddle of lonely hills, and no sound at all.

The softest noise, like the rustle of an autumn leaf, made her turn her head. Within a few feet of her, regarding her keenly, stood Muckle John. Where he had come from, and how he had come, she did not attempt to guess.

"Well," said he, "and how's Mistress Macpherson the day?"

"Finely."

"And the little business?"

"Is completed."

"Good!" he said, and smiled with great good humour.

"I handed Rob your letter."

"And did he tak' my meaning?"

"He said I was to thank ye, and give ye this bit o' paper, which he tore from your message."

His mouth tightened suddenly. A slight frown wrinkled his brow, and his eyes flickered quickly upon her, and then to the paper in her hand.

Suddenly, as though a nameless fear had gripped him, he glowered at her, and snatched the thing out of her fingers. Then, turning his back, he read it at a glance, and, flinging it upon the ground, burst into a torrent of Gaelic, his face a deep scarlet with fury. His unruffled composure was gone. In its place was the blazing Highland temper. Words poured from his lips, his eyes flashed with impotent rage, his whole body trembled with passion.

"Are you ill, sir?" cried Miss Macpherson, fearing he had gone mad.

But he only snarled at her. Then, swinging about, he began to stride backwards and forwards between the trees, muttering in low tones, his hands clenched, and his chin upon his chest. After a dozen turns in this fashion he seemed to recollect her presence and, halting a little below her, he raised his gleaming eyes to hers.

"Madam," he said, in a trembling, harsh tone,

"I would give all I possess that you and your precious nephew had never seen the light of day. Oh—it is too much!" He broke off, kicking savagely at a tuft of grass.

"But, sir . . ." she broke in, for once considerably alarmed.

"Don't sir me!" raved Muckle John, snapping her up. "But go, and let me never see your face again!"

"But Rob?"

"The sly ninny! The whey-faced, ungrateful gowk! Let him go hang for his ain dourness! A pretty fool he has made o' me, madam; and no man nor boy either shall live to fling that in my teeth."

With the strength of a sudden terror she caught him by the arm.

"What sort of talk is this?" she cried. "Have I no done my share, and sent Rob halfway to his death in order that you may snatch him back? Oh, I said you were no honest man!"

"Honest?" he snapped, with a bitter laugh. "Oh, you're right enough there. Heaven preserve me frae being called 'honest,' I'm no shopkeeper, madam."

"Ye were anxious enough about Rob's safety last night."

Muckle John ceased from glowering at the glen beneath them.

"The boy's safety go hang," he retorted.

"Did ye think I cared two bawbees for that?"

"It has occurred to me that you promised," returned Miss Macpherson.

"Promised! What are promises between you and me?"

"Then Rob is to be left to his fate?"

"No."

"What do you mean?"

Muckle John turned, and threw back his shoulders.

"You have yet to learn," he said stiffly, "that the oath of a Highland gentleman can never be broken. I swore on the dirk I would bring him safe from prison, and that I will do."

Once more he seemed on the point of falling into another fit of fury; but fought it down, and pointed instead to her horse.

"Go!" he cried. "And not a word of this or I'll string you up to your ain roof-tree, and no' so sorry to have the excuse."

"Mercy me!" murmured Miss Macpherson, and made for her beast.

Then, mounting, she sent him through the heather towards the track.

A hundred yards down the hill-side she looked back. But the little cluster of trees was empty of life. Muckle John had vanished as though he had never been. With a sudden fear clutching at her heart, she dug her heels into the horse's ribs, and broke into a disjointed canter.

On the same morning that saw Miss Macpherson urging her mount towards Inverness, in a cave upon a wild and desolate mountain-top three men were seated playing a hand of cards. They were all in the Highland dress, and armed to the teeth—lean, swarthy men, burned by the sun to a deep black-red—sitting silent as statues, eyes intent upon the game. Beside one of them lay a handful of gold coins. Near the mouth of the cave, lying on his stomach, was a boy of about fifteen, watching the hill-side.

Suddenly he uttered a low word in Gaelic, and instantly but in the same grave silence the men ended their play, and gathering up the cards one slipped them into his sporran.

A moment later the mouth of the cave darkened and the huge form of Muckle John filled the entrance. He nodded to each of them as they saluted him, and motioning them to be seated he lay for a long time gnawing his lip and staring gloomily upon the ground. They appeared not unused to such behaviour for they drew together at the farthest corner and the man with the cards in his sporran took them out again and, dealing them round, the game went on as before. An hour passed and Muckle John had said no word—had made no sign. Of a sudden, however, a slow smile began to creep into his eyes and soften the corners of his mouth. A droll expression flitted across his face and vanished.

Then, taking a piece of clean paper from his pocket, and a pencil, he studied Rob's writing in a deep pause, and began to write in a close imitation, as follows :

"This to tell you that the treasure is discovered, and that unless it be put in a safe place, all will be lost. The bearer of this letter can be trusted. Come to me at a place that this man will show you, for the Prince is with me, and is in need of you and some gold. ROB FRASER."

This he addressed to Dr. Archibald Cameron in the Braes of Lochaber, and turning towards the crouching circle in the corner, he called one of them, Donald Grant by name, to him, and instructed him for some time in a very earnest voice.

"Listen, Donald," he said, "and let there be no bungling, for I am not minded to be soft-spoken if aught goes wrong. In Lochaber there lies a gentleman by name Archibald Cameron—a brother to Lochiel. He is skulking with Murray of Broughton. I heard so much two days since. Hand him this paper and keep a slow tongue, but if he presses you say you were sent by a laddie—a reddish, blue-eyed Fraser boy, and that maybe he minds the words—'there's a muirfowl snared.' Bring him with you and keep him under close guard until I come back. But before you do that, give this second strip of

tartan to John Murray of Broughton, and bid him hand it to Lord Lovat as a warning from one he kens well."

With these words he dismissed the man, who slid through the entrance and set out at a slow indefatigable trot for the south.

In the same active, masterful manner he summoned the remainder of the party and addressed them rapidly in Gaelic.

"Now," said he at last, "is all clear? Evan Grant, who is in the stables of Fort Augustus, will see that the cart is ready. When the confusion is at its height he will put in the horse. You, Donald Chisholm, will lead the horses below the rampart during the night and mind they do not whinny at the dawn. There I will join you at cock-crow and a boy with me that will serve our purpose. He is like enough to another I ken of to hoodwink a pack of red-coats. Should aught go wrong make for the hills, and turn the beasts loose. Should they be deceived as I know they will, lead them into bog-land and scatter. You understand?"

They all nodded their heads.

"This day week then, for I have other work till then. Now go—but leave the lad there to watch the glen."

Silently they crawled out of the cave-mouth, and were lost among the neighbouring rocks.

Then, wrapping himself in his great-coat, Muckle John took the reed from his pocket

and began to play a Skye song that the oarsmen sing for keeping time. But soon he tired of that and played an old Highland lament that is as full of sorrow as the hollow of the hills with snow. He played it in a heart-breaking fashion with an eye upon the boy in the cave-mouth, who was a Macpherson and easily moved. And when he saw the tears coursing down his brown cheeks he could not but gulp too, partly through sympathy but most of all because of his own grand playing.

It was now the month of May, and still Rob lay in his cell. During the past ten days every source of refined torture had been applied to break down his silence. Starved, beaten, threatened, he maintained a stony front, until Strange in despair had left him to himself for two whole days. It was on the morning of the third day that he returned, and Rob saw by the elation in his eyes that something had happened. He could only guess that it meant another disaster to the hunted Jacobites.

"Up, you dog!" he cried; "and hear the news. What has your silence earned you, do you think? It has made you a traitor, Master Rob Fraser—a name that your clan will revile for all time. Ho, ho, ho! Think of that now—there's fame for ye! I'd give twenty guineas to hear what Lovat says when he learns that he was betrayed by . . ."

"Stop!" cried Rob, "why should he believe such a lie?"

"Because we shall have to break it to him. Otherwise he might guess who is really telling secrets, Rob, and that would spoil all."

With a mournful groan, the boy covered his face with his hands.

"Why do you not kill me now?" he asked in a hopeless voice.

"Kill you?" echoed Strange. "Man alive, there'd be poor sense in that! It is just because we will not hang ye that people will know just why. No, no, Rob. You'll live like a fighting-cock, whether ye like it or no."

"It will take more than you to find Lord Lovat," broke out Rob.

Strange shook his head gleefully.

"Shall I whisper where he lies hid?" he said. "There's an island at the foot of Arkaig, called Moror—am I no right?" and he shook with silent laughter.

At that the floor beneath Rob's feet seemed to dance up and down, and a great despair made him deaf to all that Strange said—deaf to the shutting of the door—to the brooding silence that settled once again upon his solitude.

When he opened his eyes the sun was sinking, and he was alone. The bitterness of the situation stunned him utterly. How could anyone deny that he had turned informer, especially when the report went round that it was to save

his life. He thought he had valued his neck; but now he knew there were things infinitely worse than death. What would he not give now to have lured on Muckle John, and so won his freedom by pretending he had the plan?

And as he brooded deeply, out of the twilight, like a bird's note dropping into silence, came the soft music of a chanter. With a cry he started to his feet and listened.

Again it reached him—a thin bar of wistful melody, the sign of Muckle John.

Snatching up his bonnet he waved it out of the narrow window, and at that the whistle sounded for the last time far away, and died on the wind.

Muckle John was ready. Hastily Rob took out the file and pistol, and laid them upon the floor. There was little chance that anyone would visit him again that night. He had eight hours before him to file through the bars of his cell, and conceal himself, just before the dawn, upon the cart of hay below. His chains he had already filed nearly through, concealing the marks with mud scraped off the damp floor of his cell.

But in case of a surprise visit he left his chains on, and set upon the rusty bars of the window, scraping and rasping until his fingers began to peel and bleed, and his arms ached with weariness. At midnight one bar was filed through and laid inside the cell. Weak and dizzy with want of food and exercise, he was forced to rest

for half an hour, and then, crawling back, he attacked the cross-bar; and two hours later he had cut it away, and the main part of the work was done. It took him only a few minutes to work himself loose of his chains.

Then, uncoiling the rope, he tied one end to the fragment of iron bar left in the window casement, and unwinding it softly he let it run down the rough, grey wall.

All was very quiet and dark. No sound reached him from below. Far away, on the outer guard, he caught the dull tramp of the sentry, marching to and fro in the wintry darkness.

The time was ripe. Slipping his pistol about his waist, Rob wormed his way, legs first, through the open window, and coiling his feet about the rope, he took a grip of it with his hands and began to slide slowly downwards.

Down, down he went; past rooms where all was dark, skinning his knees upon the sharp edges of stone, bumping and swaying, but nearing ground at every yard, and with the breath of sweet night air upon his cheek.

And so at last, without misadventure, he reached the inner courtyard, and looked about for the cart of hay.

The dawn was not far distant now, and he crept about the place feeling his way, seeing but dimly, and fearful that there was no cart at all.

At last, however, some ten yards away, his hand touched a wheel. With a gasp of relief he ran his fingers through soft wisps of hay over his head. Then climbing up, he wormed his way beneath a bundle of horse-cloths, and waited for the morning.

The cart had apparently unloaded and was ready to leave the fort. Fortunately for Rob the cloths were heavy, and the horses' nose-bags and other articles made sufficient to entirely conceal his presence. But how Muckle John could hope to avert suspicion falling on such an obvious place of concealment, he could not imagine.

Very gradually the grey, flickering lights of another day glimmered above the fort, and still there was no sound of alarm—no sign of Muckle John.

Now the side of the fort where Rob's cell lay was not much frequented until broad daylight, the sentry rarely coming so far along—an item with which Muckle John was well acquainted. Opposite this part the hill sloped upwards towards broken country, commanding a clear view from the walls.

It was not until seven o'clock, for the morning was dark and cold, that a man passing through the inner courtyard to water the horses saw the rope dangling down the wall, and with a frenzied shout brought the sentry at a run towards him.

"Prisoner escaped!" yelled the fellow.

With an answering cry the sentry raced away. A moment later a bugle sounded the call to arms. Clatter of muskets, hoarse voices, commands, questions, running footsteps—all the characteristic commotion of a sudden alarm—reached Rob in his hiding-place, and set him wondering whether Muckle John had failed him, or whether he had dreamed he heard the reed.

For his position was precarious. He had escaped for the time; but he was like a rat in a trap—able neither to go backwards nor forwards.

The voice of Strange interrupted his anxious thoughts.

"Guard the gates!" he ordered. "Come with me, you men, and search the cell." Up the stairs they stamped and their footsteps died away.

Rob imagined them tearing up the stone steps to his cell. He could almost see Strange peering through the window with its filed bars.

Suddenly he heard him shout from far above him as though his head were thrust out of the window:

"There he is! There he is!" It sent a shiver through his limbs.

But no one approached the cart.

Instead, the excitement grew even more intense, and the courtyard about the cart became thronged with hurrying soldiers. On the outer walls he heard muskets firing, and cries of

"There they go!" as though they aimed at men upon the hill. It was all very baffling and mysterious.

Was Muckle John attempting a rescue by force of arms? Rob lay very still, and then his perplexity was set at ease, for he heard a voice he knew well call from a window some twenty feet above him:

"Vot is it, Strange?" and Strange, despite his hurry replied:

"The prisoner, Rob Fraser, your Highness, is riding away up the hill with another man."

"Then after 'im, Strange!" roared the Duke. "Ten pounds to the man who catches 'im. Open the gates; I vill take 'orse myself!"

With a rattle the gates rolled back. The soldiers galloped through, Strange at their head. A few moments later and troopers were spurring up the hill-side—the whole fort was deserted for such a steeplechase. Ten pounds seemed within the grasp of many that day.

The last trooper had hardly dashed away before a man came quickly across the courtyard leading a heavy horse. With swift hands he hitched it to the wagon, and, swinging himself up on the side with his feet upon Rob, he started towards the gates.

A solitary soldier challenged him with a broad grin.

"No rebels in that cart?" he said, peeping over the top.

The man in the cart laughed heartily.

"He was more than a match for you," he replied.

"That 'e was," agreed the soldier. "But 'ow anyone can get out of this fort beats me. Somebody will look foolish over this."

"Be glad it is not you," returned the man in the cart.

"Me?" cried the other, for they were now twenty yards down the road. "There'd be few rebels lost if I had a word in it."

"I can see that," shouted back the man in the cart.

And so they passed along the moorside, and out of sight of the fort.

Half an hour later they encountered the soldiers returning.

"Not got him?" asked the man in the cart.

A sergeant stopped while the rest of them trudged on.

"No; they left their horses and took to the crags."

"Where are the dragoons?"

"Led into a bog, and still there."

Then, shaking his head, the soldier marched after his company.

Long after Rob threw back the rugs, and sitting up blinked in the sunlight.

"Well, Rob," said the man in the cart, but with little warmth of manner.

It was Muckle John!

CHAPTER XV

"A MUIRFOWL SNARED"

Now the man that Muckle John had sent speeding from the cave-mouth to the south reached northern Lochaber, and halting in a place under a rock, waited for the dawn.

Very slowly the wintry night began to grow more grey. A cold wind fluttered the beard of the watcher under the rock. From the bleak hill-side a dog-fox barked, and with the passing of night a stag moved like a shadow up the brae and stood for a moment gazing backward, silhouetted against the skyline.

And still the man waited, watching the track below him. It must have been about seven o'clock, and the sun barely risen, when down the glen came two men walking very rapidly and saying no word to one another. Foremost came a short, strongly built man with a round, genial countenance and shrewd blue eyes. About four paces behind again there limped and tottered a broken cadaverous figure, heavily cloaked and yet coughing dismally in the bleak Highland air, and leaning his weight upon a stick.

All the way down the glen they never exchanged a word; but once the man who led the

way halted, and drawing a flask from his pocket handed it to his companion, who tilted it up and then broke into a worse fit of coughing than before,

The messenger of Muckle John snug under the crag took them in with one long, penetrating glance, but no expression of surprise or triumph or relief crossed his face. He regarded them, as he had regarded the stag, with cold, inscrutable eyes.

Through the hanging mists they came, and when they had drawn level with his place of concealment he uttered a forlorn cry—such as the whaup sends falling over an empty moor. Instantly the little man who walked in front stopped in his stride, and sent his eyes sweeping the skyline above his head. But no whaup was there. Then turning he said a word to his companion, who only shook his head wearily, as though all the whaups in Scotland might have cried themselves hoarse for all he cared.

Presently the man under the rock whistled very softly.

"I hear ye, sir," said the short fellow, speaking in Gaelic but never raising his head; "and who might ye be there, like a fox in his earth?"

"It is Archibald Cameron I want," replied the messenger of Muckle John.

At that the tall, cadaverous man seemed to bestir himself, and began to speak in a low anxious tone to his companion, who cut him short, however, with scant courtesy.

"What is it you want?" he cried, turning

his head towards the hill. "I am Archibald Cameron, and now your name, sir, and your business?"

"Will ye come up, Dr. Cameron? You will find me beneath the round rock ten paces from the burn."

"Come," said Cameron to the man with him; "there's maybe news of the Prince."

"No news," sighed the other, "is better than bad news."

Then taking to the hill-side they reached the hidden place and crept within.

It was a hole of about six feet by eight and three feet high, and with the sickly smell of a fox's lair.

"A couthy bit corner," said Cameron to his companion, dropping into broad Scots. "What wad we do, Broughton, had we no siclike places as this?" Saying which he yawned and eyed the other mischievously. "Man," he said, with twinkling eyes, "ye'd mak' a bonny scarecrow."

"Oh, have done!" broke out Murray of Broughton (for he it was) in a shrill, peevish voice. "What good can such filthy nooks and crannies avail us? I am like to die," he wailed on, and started coughing, with his hands clutching his sides. Already the Prince's secretary, broken in health, haunted by the constant fear that the Chevalier whom he loved sincerely was taken, oppressed also by his own danger, was coming nearer day by day to his disgrace, driven onward by the weakness of body and mind which

may make of any man a coward in the face of death.

His face was drawn with sickness and anxiety. In his pale haunted eyes there flickered a sleepless dread. Murray had all the loyalty, but none of the reckless temerity of the true adventurer.

Meanwhile Cameron had taken tobacco from his pocket.

"A pipe," he said, "I must have, though all the Elector's red-coats were to sit around this spot and sniff the dear smell into their red faces."

Then blowing a cloud of smoke which sent poor Murray into a fit of coughing, he turned abruptly upon the messenger of Muckle John, saying in Gaelic :

"Do you understand Scots ? For our friend here, whose name you are probably well acquainted with, has no Gaelic, poor creature ! "

The man nodded.

"What is your name ? " asked Cameron.

"My name is Donald Grant, and I am from Glenmoriston," said the other.

"A Grant," sniffed Cameron ; "well, well, we canna all be Camerons."

He drew up his legs and sat with his elbows on his knees.

"What is your news ? " he asked. "Is it of the Prince ? "

"Partly—and partly not."

"That's a braw answer," snapped Cameron. "It's unco like maybe, and maybe no. Ye're muckle confidential, you Grants."

"I have a letter," said he, "from one well known to ye—Rob Fraser."

"Rob Fraser! I ken nane o' that name. Oh, bide a wee! Ye mean a laddie?"

Grant nodded.

"That same," he replied.

Cameron drew in a cloud of tobacco and sent it floating in rings above his head.

"Yon's a bonny one," he murmured, and then, cocking an eye upon the other. "Where's the letter?"

Grant drew it carefully from his stocking.

Cameron read:

"This to tell you that the treasure is discovered, and that unless it be put in a safe place all will be lost. The bearer of this letter can be trusted. Come to me at a place that this man will show you, for the Prince is with me, and is in need of you and some gold. ROB FRASER."

"Humph!" grunted Cameron. Then he took to reading it again, weighing every word. Once he stared for a very long time at the messenger, but the followers of Muckle John were chosen carefully. The expression of Grant's bearded face displayed no emotion whatever.

Presently, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he pursed his lips, and handing the letter to Murray, frowned and pulled at one ear, humming and keeping time with his foot—the very picture of a man wanting to go all ways at one and the same time.

"It looks genuine enough," he said grudgingly in Murray's ear, "but I've no knowledge of the laddie's writing."

"Who is Rob Fraser?" asked Murray with shut eyes.

"I had near forgot myself; but he was useful that night on the shore of Arkaig. Maybe ye tak' my meaning?" Saying which he winked and looked meaningly at the other.

"Then what does he ken of where the stuff lies?" whispered Murray.

"About as much as the trout in the burn, which maybe is none so little after all." And again he winked and laughed.

"Will ye go, Archie?"

"I canna just say. It looks uncommon like a trap, and yet . . ." He broke off suddenly and addressed the man Grant.

"What is this boy like?" he asked sharply.

"He is short and open-faced, and is dressed in the Fraser tartan. He is dark and speaks good Gaelic."

"That's Rob sure enough. Where has he been since he left Lochaber?"

"He was captured and laid in Fort Augustus, but he has escaped and is now Glenmoriston way."

"Glenmoriston is a far cry," said Cameron. "Did he send no word beside this?"

"He said, 'There's a muirfowl snared,' though I did not take his meaning."

"He said that?" said Cameron in a sharp

voice. Then turning to Murray he grasped his arm. "Ye hear that?" he cried. "It's Rob right enough, and the Prince with him." He snatched up the letter again. "Gold," he repeated, and back came the frown. "No," he said under his breath, "I'll take no gold. I seem to scent treachery in the word gold. What need has the Prince with such? It's something mair substantial he'll require. Murray," he broke off, "how much have ye upon you?"

"A hundred louis d'or—nae mair," said he. "But tak' it, Archie—only leave me ten for my ain needs."

The coins again changed hands and Cameron again addressed Grant.

"What other news do ye bring?" he asked.

"There is word," Grant replied, "that the soldiers are moving south."

He took to rummaging again in his shirt and drew out a piece of tartan—a tangled, stained fragment about the size of a man's hand.

"One who shall be nameless," said he, "has ordered me to give this to Murray of Broughton, begging him to put it into Lovat's own hands."

"It is a warning," gasped Cameron, "he says they are moving south."

Murray showed no relish for the business.

"I have no wish to speak with Lovat," he replied, "I am the last man from whom he would take such a message."

"Tuts, Broughton," said Cameron im-

patiently, "at a time like this private misunderstandings are out of the question—ye may save him from the scaffold."

"I would," retorted Murray sourly, "I could bring him to it. But give me the rubbish, I'll see he receives it, though it's poor thanks I'll get."

"You misjudge him, man—he's dour but he's old. This man here has brought it from the Prince belike, who else?" he swung round on the messenger of Muckle John, "you are a Jacobite I take it?" he asked.

The man shook his head.

"I am a Jacobite where my ain race are concerned," he replied, at which Cameron regarded him gravely, and seemed somewhat suspicious and uncertain what to make of him.

Then turning to Murray he drew him outside the place, and they lay about a dozen paces distant amongst the heather.

"Ye ken what this means, Murray?" he said. "There's some one must warn Lovat. It's the Prince has sent word—leastways, ye can tell Lovat so, it will hearten the old man. Should he be taken the Highlands will lose heart. Get him carried by night Badenoch way. Could he win to Cluny's cage he would be as snug as a rat in a hole—and no sic a bad simile, eh?"

"I'll go," said Murray, staring with tired eyes across the glen.

"I'm no taken with this fellow here," went on Cameron, looking over his shoulder, "and yet

what more can I want? He carries the daft words I gave to Rob just to impress him, and send him like a hare out of Arkaig—he warns us for Lovat. Oh, John, what can ye mak' o' it?"

For a long time the other continued to stare into empty space. Then turning his head slowly he let his tragic eyes rest on Cameron.

"I know he is no true man," he said, sombrely, "but how I know I cannot tell you. And yet he is no Government man—that I am sure. So I give it up!" His tone dropped into silence, and sighing heavily he drew in his breath to cough.

"Then I will go," said Cameron abruptly. "Good-bye, John; keep watch for a French ship and send word when it shall come."

So shaking hands they parted without another word, never to meet again.

The sun was up and the glen lay clear and lifeless when Cameron and Grant began their weary journey northwards. The last they saw of Murray was his stooping form crawling over the brow of the hill opposite, leaning heavily upon his stick, like a wounded crow limping with broken wings.

After the futile scheme for the continuation of the war—which as all the world knows resulted in only a few hundred men (no Frasers) assembling—all further resistance was at an end, and Lord Lovat, who throughout had no inten-

tion of giving any personal demonstration of disloyalty, returned to his island in Loch Morar.

On a spring day late in May when the countryside was bright with the promise of flowers and the birds sang upon every tree, Murray of Broughton visited him, and inside the hut where he lay waiting for news of a French ship, handed him the fateful scrap of tartan—the second warning of Muckle John.

Lovat was lying upon the floor with his back against that same strong box that Rob had carried from Gortuleg House, unshaven and dishevelled with privation and distress, and none too glad to see his visitor.

At the four sides of the island a Fraser was on guard watching the shore—a dozen more sat around the hut, while on the surrounding hills about Morar there were others spying the glens below, intent on the chance approach of the soldiers.

Lovat, who flattered himself he could guess any man's errand, greeted Murray distantly and waved him to a stool. He took a pinch of snuff himself, but seemed in no mind to show a like hospitality to his guest.

"I thought you were in France by now," he said at last. "It were best for us all if you could steer clear of the Government."

"I do not take your lordship's meaning," answered Murray flushing. "I, at any rate, have had no dealings with the Government."

"But that same Government would like fine to have some dealings with you, my man, and supposing they had, supposing they had . . ."

He looked at him keenly, then laid one finger against another in a manner very typical.

"It was a wicked business," he said, "and had I not moments of dotage I would never have even seemed to have sympathized with it, Murray. But what could an old man do? I had no power—no influence—I was deserted by the Lord-President, a man I trusted like a brother. It was a cruel attack on the crown, Murray, and well ye ken it. What men can do to rectify the wrong we should do, even if it goes against the grain."

Murray listened at first without much comprehension, then with a quickening suspicion of treachery in the air. He realized that Lovat was ready as ever to turn his coat.

"No, no," he cried, "I am not here for that."

Lovat, who had never imagined he was there for any other purpose, regarded him with his customary contempt.

"Then you are a greater fool," he rasped, "than even I took ye for. What have you to gain by your silence? This is the last rising for the Stuarts. There will be nothing now but the English and the English tongue. It makes me sick to see a man crying out against what must be."

Murray shook his head and rose to his feet.

"I have come," he said simply, "at some inconvenience to myself, to do you a service. Here is a token that I doubt not ye ken well and so I wish you good-bye," and handing Lovat the piece of tartan he prepared to leave. But with a strange hoarse cry the old man struggled to his feet. He was beside himself with rage.

Murray, too amazed to move, hesitated in the doorway, and catching up a stick Lovat struck him down before he could raise an arm to defend himself, or avert the blows. Indeed, he lay as though stunned with horror or too broken in body to protect himself.

There was a noise of footsteps outside and a dozen men prevented the Fraser from injuring him further, and after a while he rose and leaving the hut reached his boat. His face was white as death, but in his eyes, hollow with fever and privation, there gleamed like a secret fire such a mad hate and anger that the boatman pulling him out upon the silent loch watched him narrowly until they reached the shore. For a minute or two he did not move, but still crouched with his eyes upon the way they had come, then groping with his hands until he reached the beach, paid them without question, and saying no word passed up the shore and out of their sight—a man long since broken in health for the cause and full of bitterness of heart, but now fired with an undying personal hatred.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CAVE IN GLENMORISTON

"MUCKLE JOHN," said Rob, as the cart came to a standstill, and his companion had kept a tight mouth for a full half-hour after his last curt words, "Muckle John, why did you rescue me?"

"Why indeed?" he replied dourly enough.

Acting on a sudden impulse Rob leapt over the side of the cart upon the bank of grass beside it, and began to walk in the direction they had come.

"Where are you going?" cried Muckle John, startled for once.

Rob paused and spoke over his shoulder.

"I'm not the one to take favours from you nor any one," he said. "I know fine why you wanted to keep me safe; and now that you've lost the thing you sought I'm no more to you than a peewit's egg." With that he set off again towards Fort Augustus.

"Stop, Rob!" shouted Muckle John. "What's taken ye?" and flinging his legs over the side of the cart, he began to run in pursuit.

"Rob!" he cried again, and came up with him.

"Well?"

"What has come over ye?" he asked. "Would ye hang yersel' just to spite me? What's done is done, Rob; and I'm no perhaps the saint ye took me for. But save ye I will, and that's the naked truth."

"Let me pass!" cried Rob, and took a step to the right of him.

"Very good," he replied grimly, "but come ye will," and catching him into his huge arms, he flung him suddenly upon the ground and bound his wrists. Struggle as Rob would it availed him less than nothing, and so at last, with hands tied together and a dirk-point in his ribs, he must needs march in the direction Muckle John wished.

For a full hour they trudged on thus, leaving the cart to care for itself.

Then at last he spoke.

"Stop!" he said, holding out his wrists. "I have had enough of this."

"Brawly spoken!" said Muckle John, and he cut the thongs.

"Where," asked Rob, "are you taking me, for I have important business in the south?"

"What might that be?"

"It is the warning of Lord Lovat."

"It is done already; I have sent a man two days since."

"Am I, then, your prisoner?"

His captor broke into a laugh.

"Just a visitor, Rob, he replied," "and nothing more."

In this manner they travelled northwards, passing through wild, desolate glens and black ravines, scaling rugged hills, seeing few upon the road, and more in the heather. Several times in the night they saw the camp-fires of the English, but Muckle John seemed as familiar with the country even in black darkness. During the day they lay close hid in some cranny of the rocks, or skulked upon the crest of a hill, watching the surrounding district for sight of moving troops.

It was nearing nightfall two days after Rob's escape from Fort Augustus when they entered a small, precipitous glen, shut in by lowering, ragged crags, while through its tortuous course a burn was drumming in a melancholy undertone. No drearier spot had ever met Rob's eye. Deserted even by the eagles, it might have been a habitation of the dead.

Now at the side of the burn a shattered pine tree was standing against the evening sky, and as such gruesome thoughts passed through Rob's mind he raised his eyes, and a cry came and died unuttered on his lips. For on a solitary branch about the height of a tall man from the heather, a human head was stuck with the hair still fluttering in the breeze; while underneath dangled the faded uniform of an English soldier.

"Look!" cried Rob.

But Muckle John only nodded absently.

"They're as common as berries hereabouts," he replied.

"Hereabouts?" repeated Rob. "Then whose land is this?"

For answer Muckle John sprang upon a rock and with his hands hollowed about his mouth, sent a clear, penetrating call. From up the hill-side a reply came swift as an echo.

"Some call it," he said, "the country of Muckle John."

Before Rob could reply several Highlanders came running down the hill-side, and greeted his companion with every sign of respect and pleasure, all of which he took very naturally.

Then passing onward they came to a narrow defile with a man on guard at the entrance, and continuing their way, reached the opening to a cave.

In the sheltered ground which lay before the cave three men were engaged around a fire, and the smell of cooking drifted in a cloud about their stooping forms.

"Rob," said Muckle John, making way for him to pass, "will you step inside, for if I am not mistaken there is one who will be pleased to see ye."

Without a word, but anxious to know to whom Muckle John could refer, Rob entered the cave. For a moment the darkness of the place made him think he was alone. Then of a

sudden he made out the form of a man lying upon the floor; and with a quick fear he knelt down and recognized Archibald Cameron, bound hand and foot.

It took Rob but a couple of slashes with his skian dhu and Cameron was free of his bonds.

Sitting up he groaned and surveyed Rob with a whimsical smile.

"This is a queer manner of hospitality," said he. "If ye had mentioned the name o' the gentleman you were serving I would have taken the hint kindly."

"I serving?" broke in Rob, "I do not understand."

Cameron shrugged his shoulders cynically.

"Maybe ye do not remember the letter," he said very politely, "maybe ye are not Rob Fraser?"

"Dr. Cameron," replied Rob, "this is no time for quarrelling. I know of no letter, and I am a prisoner like youreslf. We are both in the hands of Muckle John."

"Muckle John! So that's how the wind blows, eh? Oh, I begin to see. Poor Rob, you're aye the scapegoat. Muckle John, indeed!"

"You know of him?"

Cameron snorted.

"Wha does not?" said he, "there's few between here and Rome has not heard tell of Muckle John."

"Then is he Hanoverian?"

"He's mair like a kite that hovers above the squabbles of other folk."

"Then what does he want with us?"

"Money."

"It's little of that I have."

"You, Rob? Oh no!" And he smiled in a way as though the idea tickled him.

Very greatly puzzled, Rob fell back on silence, and presently Muckle John himself entered the place.

He was in Highland dress and made a great appearance of surprise at seeing Cameron, which ill accorded with the reception that unfortunate gentleman gave him. Then turning, he clapped Rob upon the shoulder and bade them both be seated.

"It's poor hospitality," said he in Gaelic; "but these are sad times, Dr. Cameron. Old campaigners like us know there's thin rations when one takes to the heather."

"Come, sir," replied Cameron, still standing and replying in Scots, "what is it you want? I ken ye fine, and well ye know it. It is not for the pleasure of my company that your cut-throats brought me here. But I warn you there will be a reckoning for this. There will be a bonny ending for you, sir, when it is known in Lochaber."

"Lochaber," sneered Muckle John. "While there is a guineapiece buried in Lochaber neither

you nor the Prince himself would raise a Cameron to his side."

"Braw words for a nameless man," cried Cameron bitterly, but very red about the neck. "Hark, Rob, for maybe ye will never hear the like again."

"I am no nameless man!" roared Muckle John; "and well ye know it."

Cameron smiled quietly to himself.

"Then the greater the smirch on your clan—though I'm no just remembering the tartan," he said.

At that Muckle John, flinging back his stool, leaped to his feet, and called out a name which no man Lochaber way can hear in silence.

For an instant, indeed, Cameron seemed on the point of springing upon him; then restraining himself with an effort, he spoke in a very polite tone:

"You will perceive," said he, "I have no sword."

But now that the thing was said Muckle John appeared greatly put about and anxious to smooth it over. He shrugged his shoulders and fiddled with the brooch upon his plaid.

"Tuts, Dr. Cameron!" he said. "I spoke over warmly."

But Cameron only frowned and shook his head.

"I have no sword," he said again.

There was no mistaking his meaning. With

a shrug Muckle John turned and left the cave.

"Do not fight him, doctor," broke in Rob. "It is sheer madness. Oh, how could ye fall into such a trap? It is to kill you he led you on."

"Rob," replied Cameron, "you are too young to understand the ways of a Highland gentleman."

"But surely you are more service to the Prince. . ."

"Whisht, boy! Dinna haver. Ye heard what word he used. A man's name means mair than a whole clan of Princes."

After that there was nothing more to be said.

The doorway darkened again and Muckle John entered with two claymores and targes.

"It is lighter outside, Dr. Cameron," he said, as though they were about to discuss a friendly bout together.

"As you will," replied Cameron with equanimity, and bowed to him to take the lead. But Muckle John bowed still lower, and with his head cocked very high Cameron passed through.

A level place of about ten feet square lay before the cave, and clustered on a ledge above sprawled and sat some dozen ragged Highlanders, who evinced no sort of interest whatever in the impending encounter.

Cameron swung his blade once or twice and

tested the steel upon the ground. The targe he threw aside. Then taking off their coats they rolled up their sleeves, and saluted each other. Seeing that the thing was past mending, Rob took his seat very sadly upon a mound and wondered how it would all end. The grey, desolate sky, the silence of utter solitude, the cluster of dirty, unmoved Highlanders, and above and upon them all the smirr of thin hill rain, made his heart sink like lead.

And in the weary greyness of it all, two men about to fight to the death over a hasty word. It was a situation typically Highland.

Cameron, as sturdy a figure as one could wish to see, was standing on guard right foot foremost, his left arm behind his back.

Muckle John was facing him, his long hair loose about his neck, his vast forearms bared, perfectly motionless, a figure of colossal strength.

Suddenly there was a faint scuffle and footsteps in the entrance way.

"Dr. Cameron—Dr. Cameron!" said a low voice, with the round softness of a foreign accent.

They all looked towards the narrow passage which led from the valley below, and Rob sprang to his feet at the sight. For standing there, dressed in faded, tattered clothes, thin and harassed, but with a smile upon his lips, was Prince Charlie.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HOLDING OF THE PASS

He was very different to the gallant figure of Inverness and Edinburgh days. Weeks of wandering in the wildest Highland country had brought out his finest, most admirable qualities. Hardship, that strange test of man, had made him far dearer and more romantic than he had ever been before. There was no jealousy of Irish favourites now—no dread of English influence when St. James's should be reached—all that was gone never to return. There was instead a Prince in a tattered kilt, and a dirty shirt, bare-footed and with a gun in his hand, a pistol and dirk by his side—a man just like themselves and thrown by the harshness of destiny upon their loyalty and succour.

Here was a Prince indeed, one who could march and shoot and have a merry word at the end of the day. Had they known what was in him a year before, who can say but the Highlands would have risen to a man.

To Rob he was wonderful, just because he was human and in distress. Even to Muckle John, strange medley of contradictions as he was, there was present in the harassed figure in the opening to the cave an emotional appeal

like the lilt of an old song. Some day he knew he would compose a melody for his beloved chanter. The very notion of it brought a lump to his throat.

Meanwhile the Prince had looked them all over with his keen frank eyes.

"Gentlemen," he said in an utterly exhausted voice, "I crave your pardon for interrupting your sport; but I am, as you see, a fugitive and hard pressed. It is good to come upon you, Dr. Cameron, so unexpectedly, for I have sore need of your guidance at this time."

Then, turning to Muckle Jahn, he looked him up and down.

"I seem to remember your face, sir," he said. "If this is your country, may I claim the rights of Highland hospitality?"

"Your Highness . . ." broke out Cameron. But he shook his head at him.

"No Prince to-day," he said, "but only a hunted man, with more thought for his next meal than the Crown of England itself."

With a start Muckle John came forward and knelt at his feet.

"Your Highness," said he, "I hold this country by right of my claymore, and the guns of these men of mine; what my name is, is neither here nor there, and what my manner of life is ye can maybe guess, and why these two gentlemen are here ye will learn from their ain lips. But it will never be said I took advantage of any

man's distress, least of all the sad plight of your Royal Highness."

Cameron, who had been fidgeting during these remarks, broke in hurriedly with a very red face.

"I cannot imagine to what you refer, sir," he said, eyeing Muckle John. "No one has anything to learn from Rob and me regarding one who is as true to the Prince as you, sir."

"Sir," returned Muckle John bowing to him gravely, "you will not find me forgetful of such words."

Before any one could say further the Prince interrupted them, and thanked Muckle John in a broken voice. Then, taking Cameron aside, he asked him how soon they could win their way to Badenoch, where he was to meet Cluny Macpherson, and to hear news of the French ships.

Cameron was about to reply, when a shout from somewhere down the glen made them both halt and look towards the watchful figure of Muckle John.

Something seemed to have turned his body to stone. Rob, who was nearest to him, stepped quickly to the spy-hole commanding the valley, and stared down the rocky slope.

For a moment he detected nothing; then, with a gasp of horror, he observed tiny blots of red running like ants among the rocks,

coming ever nearer—red-coats following upon the trail.

A hand touched him upon the shoulder.

"Not a word of this to the Prince," whispered Muckle John, "but do as I bid." And he led him a little away.

"Now, Rob," he said, "let what happened in the past have the go-by, and dinna think ower hardly of Muckle John. I liked ye fine, Rob, and when you wrote that letter from the fort I could have cried at the daft spirit of it. Well, Rob, there's the English, and here are we; and some one must hold this pass if the Prince is to win through."

"But cannot we run for it?"

"He is too tired for that, Rob, and in the open country we should be shot down like hares. Now, away with ye all, and take Grant here to guide you. Make for the south, and dinna stop putting leg to earth for an hour. After that I can promise no more." Turning aside he beckoned to his men, and placed them in position along the side of the slope.

Rob rejoined the Prince and Dr. Cameron, and described the situation. For long Charles was set upon aiding in the defence; but the knowledge that such a course would probably seal the fate of his friends, persuaded him on flight. There was not a moment to spare.

Accompanied by the man Grant, and bidding a hasty and melancholy farewell to Muckle

John, they hurried down the hill-side and disappeared.

Rob let them go in silence. The Prince was safe for the present, and with him Cameron and the keys to the treasure. For him, as for Muckle John, there was nothing but danger, even if they won through in the defence of the pass.

Presently the first shot rang re-echoing down the desolate glen, and he crept forward to where Muckle John sat with a musket across his knees.

"Rob!" he cried, in a voice half anger, half surprise.

"I could not go," he said simply.

For a moment Muckle John looked at him queerly.

"Man, Rob," he said at last, "you're a rare one. But what of Mistress Macpherson? Promise me that you will take to your heels when I tell ye, and go straight for Inverness. She will shield you till better times. Promise, Rob."

"I promise," replied he.

Next moment the firing started in earnest.

Rob took in the situation at a glance. It was very improbable that the soldiers had come upon them by accident. They most certainly knew that the Prince was in hiding in the cleft of the hill. To surround the place was impossible. The only way was to rush the defence, and carry the pass by storm. The reckless

manner in which they exposed themselves pointed to the prize they had in view.

As he looked down the glen, lying full length upon a smooth-faced boulder, something in the appearance of a soldier standing a little apart made him call to Muckle John and point him out.

At that very moment, however, the man took off his hat to wipe his brow, and they recognized the cunning features of Captain Strange.

"The crows are gathering," said Muckle John in his sombre voice, and taking careful aim he fired at him, and sent his hat flying from his hand.

"A miss!" he cried, bitterly; and, as though the report of his gun were the signal for the advance, the soldiers began to move rapidly towards them.

What Strange was shouting to them Rob could not hear; but probably, elated at the chance of capturing the Prince, and vying with one another in scrambling up the precipitous place, they were surprised to see a dozen of their number riddled with bullets before they had come to within a hundred yards of the pass.

Then, taking cover, they began to move their way upwards, firing as they came. It was a case of a hundred against a dozen; but after an hour the rocks were dotted with silent red-coats, and still the little garrison held

out. Two Highlanders were killed and one wounded.

The Prince had had his chance. Unless some unforeseen misfortune had overtaken him he was safe by now.

Calling his men softly, Muckle John dispatched two with the one who was wounded, thus reducing his forces to seven, and, lighting a pipe, he calmly awaited the next attack.

It came with a wild rush, and a shattering fire some ten minutes later. The English had planted a dozen marksmen up the hill sides to command the pass, and under the protection of their fire the remainder began to run towards the narrow defile.

Half a dozen dropped and still they came on, and three more of the little band of defenders fell under the storm of bullets.

"Claymores!" cried Muckle John suddenly, and unsheathing his great blade, he flung down his musket and charged upon the foremost of the advancing soldiers.

Rushing fresh and swiftly, with the slope to aid them, they drove the enemy back in confusion, hewing them down like corn under the scythe. But two more men were lost and the holding of the pass was nearing its end.

Last of all to retrace his foosteps into the narrow pathway was Muckle John, and even as Rob turned to speak to him a shot rang out and a bullet lodged in his ankle-bone.

"It's all over now, Rob," he said, looking at the wound. "I couldn't cover a hundred yards like this. Go, laddie, and you, Grant, and you, Macpherson—away with you. I can hold the place for a time." With the help of the man Macpherson he bound a piece of his shirt tightly about his ankle, and rested upon his other leg.

All was very quiet outside. Evidently the enemy were gaining breath for the next and final assault.

"Away with you," said Muckle John.

But the two men would not leave him. They stood with Rob, awaiting his fury—and they had not to wait long.

"Grant," he screamed, "what is this? Are you not sworn to obey me? And you, Macpherson? Oh, that I should be flouted to my very face! Begone, or I will kill you with my own sword!"

They were now in full view of the soldiers, but no shot fell. Possibly the sight of a wrangle at such a time was too amazing to be missed.

Avoiding his eyes the two Highlanders drew apart from their infuriated leader, and spoke together in Gaelic.

"Are you going?" roared Muckle John.

They nodded, and passing him, strode down the pass towards the soldiery.

Even Muckle John was taken by surprise. With a sharp cry he attempted to stop them, but

it was too late. They were twenty yards away before he had scrambled along the track.

Then leaning heavily upon the smooth face of the rock, he watched them with wistful eyes, saying no more.

"Farewell!" he cried at last; and fetching out his chanter he began to play the "Battle of the Clans," at which they turned and saluted him, and then, swinging their claymores, rushed upon the soldiers, and slashing right and left, fell amongst a heap of slain.

In the pause that followed Muckle John changed the tune to the "Lament for the Children," which is like a moonlit sea for sadness. All the glen lay silent for a space at his playing.

In a kind of superstitious fear the red-coats waited, dreading the black hills and menacing landscape, but dreading most of all the stricken player up above. It was Captain Strange who shook them from their panic.

Very cautiously they began to creep upwards, and at that, Muckle John put away his whistle, and turning for his sword, saw Rob standing beside him, a bare claymore in his hand.

"You here!" he cried. "I thought you had gone. It was dreaming I was, Rob. Run, boy, for the night is close upon us. Ye won't? Well, well—it's a rare spirit ye have, Rob, but it's like to trip you up this night," and he swept the passage with his sword.

"Guard you my legs, Rob, and when I'm

tired of standing on one foot, I'll lean against the wall." So in the deepening gloom, without further word they awaited the attack.

It came very suddenly. Two soldiers rushed with a wild shout down the echoing passage-way. One was pierced on the instant by the point of Muckle John's sword ; the other swung about, and was caught on the turn by a lunge from Rob.

"Two," said Muckle John softly, and eased his dirk for the short upward stab. A moment's pause, and four men came at a cautious pace towards them. Muskets they carried, but they did not level them for fear of hitting the Prince, for so they took the indistinct figure of Rob to be. Instead, they clubbed them, and prepared to smash down the defence of their sword-play.

At that, however, Muckle John slipped a pistol out of his belt, and discharged it in their faces, to their utmost confusion. One man screamed, and, holding his hands to his eyes, dashed headlong down the slope. His cries sent a chill to Rob's very heart.

Then suddenly they charged the place, driving the foremost men onward from the rear, and even the quick thrust and stab of Muckle John could not resist that reckless onslaught. Within a few minutes the heap of the dead and fallen men was up to their elbows in that narrow place.

The voice of Strange urging on the fragments

of his force now reached them. But only muttering curses and sullen voices followed, and with a laugh, Muckle John whistled a Highland rant—a mischievous, derisive tune, with a world of insolence in it.

It brought its reply, for even as he whistled, a single man came down the black passage-way, staying his pace only when he stood within sword-thrust.

"Muckle John," he said quietly.

The other ceased his whistling.

"At your service, Captain Strange," he replied, with a faint note of amusement in his voice.

"Will you have it out with me, Muckle John?" went on Strange. "Let it be to the death, for they will never forgive me this night's work."

"Oho!" cried Muckle John. "Here's a ploy! Did they think that such as you could take me?"

"Not you; but one whom you have sheltered, Heaven alone knows why. Is he still here?"

"He left two hours ago and more. You must search Lochaber, Captain Strange. I doubt you've made a sair muddle of this."

The moon was topping the hills, and a soft grey light stole suddenly down the crags, and fell upon the face of Strange.

"What of your men?" asked Muckle John at last.

Strange gave a bitter laugh.

"They will not stir," he said, "and if they do, Rob here can hold the pass."

"I am not an executioner," said Muckle John, "and I have only one leg."

"Then I must say that Muckle John was mair glib with his tongue than his sword. But I will not say Muckle John—I will say . . ."

"Enough! Let that name bide its time."

For a minute Muckle John remained silent, then limping towards the flat place before the cave-mouth, he took a long draught of water.

"Come on, sir," he cried, "and you, Rob, guard the pass."

He saluted Strange, who had flung off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, but suddenly he lowered his sword.

"Should I fall," he said, "what of Rob here?"

"He shall go free."

With that they fell to, and the rasping of steel upon steel was the only sound in the grim silence.

Muckle John, supporting his weight upon one leg, foiled the vicious thrusts of his opponent with steady endurance. That Strange was a skilled fencer of the rapier school he realized at once. That he was also cunning and agile he took for granted.

Had he been able to act on the offensive, and bring his vast strength to the attack, no rapier play could have warded off his great blade and iron arm, and yet the growing strain upon

his sound ankle was already telling. He was like a man fighting against time.

With a feint Strange lunged for his neck—only a flicker of cold steel, but Muckle John was a fraction of a second quicker, and his opponent, recovering, crouched in the moonlight like a panther foiled in its spring.

Rob, in the meantime, had striven to watch the passage; but no sign of an attack came to set him on his guard, and few could have turned their backs upon that fierce contest amongst the grey, watching crags.

For now Strange had changed his tactics, and strove to lure on Muckle John and catch him off his balance; but there was more in it than that, for nearing the moon sailed a belt of black cloud, and much can be done by one active as a cat in the darkness. But Muckle John was also aware of the cloud and when it drifted over the moon, and they were plunged in darkness, he turned silently to his right, and, kneeling upon one knee, pointed his sword upwards, leaning meanwhile upon his naked dirk.

That Strange would attack on his wounded side so as to ensure a speedy dispatch, was more than probable. It was not the first time that Muckle John had fought in the black darkness. A moment, and a whistle of steel passed close to his ear, and lunging upwards with a twist of the wrist, he felt the blade win home, and a dreadful cry broke the stillness.

Slowly the moon passed out of the clouds, and streamed its feeble light upon the open space between the rocks.

On the smooth surface Strange lay with one arm outstretched and the other clutching his breast.

"He fought hard," said Muckle John, staggering to his feet. "I doubt I've killed him."

The wounded man began to cough, and then, without a spoken word, turned a little away from them, and with a shudder lay utterly still.

For a moment they stood above him, then Muckle John turned to Rob.

"Come," said he, "for we must be far from here before the dawn."

And so they passed out of that terrible place, with all its silent forms on the hill-side and that one lonely figure huddled in the moonlight, Muckle John leaning upon Rob's shoulder, limping towards the west.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WHISTLE OF THE BANSHEE

In the greyness of the dawn Muckle John called a halt.

"Rob," he said, "here is the day and only a mile covered since last night. Ye ken what that means? Within a few hours reinforcements will arrive from Fort Augustus, they will find the body of Strange—what must follow then?"

Rob shook his head. Escape seemed impossible.

"And yet," said Muckle John, "there must be a way—there's always a way, Rob, if you give your mind to it. There is no prison that cannot be broken, no wall that cannot be scaled—with luck and a cool head. I know, Rob, for have I not done it time and again? But I've always had a sound pair of legs. Let us look at the situation, Rob. Within an hour or two this country-side will be hotching with red-coats. They think the Prince is hereabouts. Now I cannot cover half a mile in that time, and there is no cover worth thinking about. Nor is the ground marshy or I could lie hid to my nose until it was night. But there is a way, Rob. . . ."

He paused and fingered his ankle very tenderly, muffling a strip of his shirt tightly round it.

"Over the knoll there, Rob, is a ruined castle, little enough of it left now to be sure, but there are four walls, a huddle of stones upon the roof, and a burial-place."

"A burial place?"

"Aye, but there's no harm in that. There was a chief of the Macraes buried there, he was a very queer man it is said, but it's long since I looked at his stone. No one ever goes near it after dark, Rob, and mind ye I'm no just hankering after it mysel'."

"But surely they will search the place?"

"Rob," said Muckle John cannily, "there's searching and searching. There's a deal in hiding where folk do not look for ye."

Again they started laboriously on, Muckle John leaning upon Rob's shoulder and supporting himself with a rough crutch hewn from a tree upon the hill-side. Just over the knoll they saw the grey stones of the old stronghold Muckle John had spoken of, a poor enough refuge to all appearances, and certainly one not likely to be overlooked by the soldiers.

Inside the walls the grass was long and rank and in the midst of the grass stood a slab of granite upon four other slabs, making a square memorial very moss-covered and decayed, marking the burial-place of the Macrae.

Opposite it in the wall was a great open

chimney-stack. To this Muckle John limped, and staring upwards beckoned to Rob.

"See here," he said, "there is about three feet up a place in the wall large enough for a small man to lie hid. You cannot see it for a very good reason, but it's a bonny spot to hide. Come, Rob, upon my shoulders—there's not a moment to lose."

"But what of you?" asked Rob.

"Up," said Muckle John, "I see them on the brow of the hill."

"No," said Rob, "I will not go until . . ."

But he had time for no more for Muckle John had him by the throat and was squeezing the very life out of him.

"Dinna clash words with me—you Fraser loon," he snarled, "up ye go or I'll break your neck."

After that Rob was only too ready to get out of reach of those terrible arms.

In the chimney-stack, just as Muckle John had said, there was a place very cunningly hollowed so as to be invisible from below, where a man looking upward saw only a square patch of sky and the broken masonry that fringed the top.

Crouching doubled up with his head upon his knees, he listened for a word from Muckle John. But none came. All he heard was a curious shuffling and a noise like the shutting of a door.

Suddenly, it seemed about a mile distant, a

bugle sounded, and very faintly there drifted to him the echo of a shout.

Through the empty place below he heard the wind crying, and the singing of it in the long grass, but of Muckle John not a word.

Out on the moor he could hear the stream drumming cheerily over the stones. It was a bright spring morning full of the singing of birds, very difficult to associate with sudden death and a quick burying under the heather. Those who had met the English on their jaunts into the hills had small reason to hope for mercy and none for the dignity of a trial. It was better to leave home by the back door and dodge the bullets. In those far-off days an English soldier at fifty yards was comparatively harmless.

Rob craned his ears for any sound of their advance. But there was not the smallest hint of impending danger. For all he knew they might be scouring the country-side Loch Ness way. They might by this time be a couple of miles away. Already he was becoming exceedingly stiff. He struggled with a growing temptation to move one leg just an inch. Very cautiously he did so. He succeeded in making a noise—not a loud noise, indeed, but in that hollow place quite loud enough to make him turn cold with fear. But nothing happened, there was no whisper of spying red-coats creeping stealthily amongst the ruins, listening for all he could tell within three feet of his hiding-place.

Suddenly he heard a rustle in the grass below him, and a creak like the noise of a boot. He was instantly transfixed with terror. It is well enough to meet death in the open, though by no means a pleasant business there, but to sit cooped up in a chimney unable to see what is happening above or below is more than human nerves can tolerate. He had a tantalizing desire to peep over the edge, to catch one heartening glimpse of the green grass below, to assure himself that a red-faced English soldier was not peering up or fixing his bayonet to poke it about inside.

But he knew in his heart that did he look down he would most surely see what he most dreaded, and so he lay still with every bone in his body aching and one leg tingling with numbness as though a score of needles were pricking it from every side.

And still nothing happened, and there was only the crying of wind about the crumbling walls, and the ceaseless drumming of stream water on the moor.

He fell into a kind of doze at last when the blood seemed to stop circulating in his body, and once he knocked his head most painfully against the sharp edges of the crevice, having nodded with fatigue. His eyes would not stay open, and a terrible struggle against sleep began. He had already suffered a rude awakening by the soldiery outside Captain Campbell's tent, and he was not desirous of undergoing another. He

began to hear noises that he knew in his heart did not exist, or if they did were caused by the creatures of the wild or birds settling for a moment up above his head. He took to staring at the opposite of the chimney where very dimly he could see the pebbles stuck in the mortaring and the rude chipped stones. These he counted for a time in order to rid his mind of the bayonet. But always he saw its gleaming steel-cold point just before his face. He could see it now. Surely it was a bayonet? Rob shut his eyes very tightly, then opened them again. It was still there. More than that it moved—it scraped against the stone just an inch from his foot. He saw a small piece chipped neatly off. He actually heard it rattle down upon the empty floor below.

With a blinding shock he realized that it was a bayonet—that they were come—that in secrecy and silent as ghosts the place was full of soldiers, had been perhaps for hours. Sleep was instantly banished and fear set him once more alert. His only hope lay in utter silence. Again the bayonet hovered like a snake within a few inches of his knees. He knew the man was staring upwards, vaguely suspicious, despite the apparent smooth emptiness of the chimney. He was not satisfied. The bayonet worked its way round the place again. Another piece chipped off, this time a larger piece. Why, Rob wondered, with the sweat upon his brow, did the man not try the

other side? It was just as likely there. Did he really know? Was this a little sport to while away the time? It was almost more than he could bear.

Very carefully the bayonet worked its blind course round again, and this time it carried about an eighth of an inch off his brogue. Next time it would be his bare flesh. Suddenly the bayonet vanished. The man apparently tired of it, or satisfied that there was no hidden place in the chimney, drew his musket down and all was quiet again.

Rob was half-minded to ease his aching limbs when a peculiar sweet smell came drifting past him. There was some one smoking in the place below, and what was more very close to the chimney to send the fragrance up the shaft of it. Rob considered the matter very carefully. It seemed possible that the soldier was alone, and quite unconscious of his presence. A man did not smoke in silence unless he was solitary, and smoking was an idle recreation not associated with premeditated murder. Perhaps the fellow was lost or tired. Perhaps (most comforting thought of all) he would fall asleep. He wondered just how he was sitting, and whether he was leaning against the hearthstone with his eyes half-closed and the top of his head not so far below him.

With the utmost caution Rob leaned forward and peeped over.

It was just as he had pictured it. In the open

fire-place a soldier was huddled at his ease, his hat upon the ground, his back against the slab of blackened stone, the pipe stuck at an angle in his mouth and his lank hair dishevelled and on end. He was dozing. Even as Rob watched him the pipe in his mouth slid upon his coat, where it lay on its side with a thin curl of smoke twining from the bowl.

Rob considered the situation. He was convinced that the man was alone, but there was the likelihood that he had been dispatched there to await the search-party. The state of that district was hardly one to encourage solitary English soldiers to sleep at their good pleasure. The ghastly pine-tree within a mile or two of this very spot was a grim enough reminder of that.

Rob was strongly inclined to fall upon him while he slept, and trust to knocking him senseless or dirking him as he struggled in the narrow fire-place. Those were not gentle times. Dirking seemed a very natural action to Rob. He looked on the soldier below him as a sworn foe beyond the claims of pity—an invader and murderer of his people. Under no possible circumstances could Rob have regarded an Englishman with sympathy or admiration since for centuries he had been looked upon as a natural enemy, and now a very bitter one indeed.

But if he failed to kill the man, then the game was up, and even if he did succeed in his design they were not much better off. Muckle John

could not reach a place of safety, and another slaughtered Englishman would only point to their near presence in the neighbourhood and redouble the soldiers' previous energies.

And then as though to settle the matter once and for all, a bugle sounded near at hand, the soldier awoke and scrambled to his feet, there was a noise of marching on the moor outside and the splashing of a horse passing through the burn. Rob heard an order given and the grounding of arms. He listened to the roll-call being read and the words of dismissal.

The short afternoon was closing in, and to his horror he realized that they were camping for the night.

Into the open room below he heard several men enter, and their conversation reached him in his hiding-place. There was little comfort in what they said. As far as he could judge the officer in charge was questioning the soldier who had fallen asleep under the chimney.

"Seen no one I suppose?" He spoke with a Highland accent.

"No, sir, and I've searched the place high and low."

"Been up the chimney?"

"Yes, sir."

"Looked under that gravestone there?"

"No, sir, it's not possible to move that."

"Call two of the men, we'll soon see to that."

There was a moment's silence and then a sound of heaving.

"Can't budge it, sir."

"Here let me have a hand."

A sudden fear came to Rob that perhaps Muckle John had taken refuge there—but no, what four men could not move it was unlikely he could lift with his injured ankle.

"Sergeant," said the officer, "march back to the cave where the engagement took place yesterday with twelve men, leave the other four with me, we'll spend the night here."

"Here, sir—with that stone?"

"It takes more than a dead Jacobite to frighten me," replied the officer, and a few minutes later Rob heard the tramp of feet die away again.

It was darkening fast and he wondered what Muckle John was doing and where he was, whether if he was lying hid in the heather he would make a sign, or whether he must spend the whole frightful night cooped up like a fowl in a pen.

He must have dozed a little when a curious noise made him start and listen with strained ears. It was a familiar enough sound—just the sharp crackling of firewood, but there was a horrible significance in it now, for a whiff of smoke curling up into his face set his eyes watering.

They had lit a fire in the hearth below. The

thin wisp of smoke grew into a column swirling unsteadily upwards. It became a solid volume choking and hot. With a sob of pain and despair Rob covered his face with his bonnet. For a few minutes that relieved his eyes and nose, but the danger of being suffocated was only subordinate to being roasted alive. It was a great roaring fire they were laying. He heard the loose sticks and dried heather falling in bundles on the blaze.

His ears sang with the suffocation of it, his brain swirled and his breath came in short gasps as a fish gasps upon a bank. And then with a pitiful cry he fell forward, down upon the fire itself and with a swirl of smoke and sparks, into the midst of the soldiers.

The officer thinking that the blackened, tattered figure might be the Prince himself hastened to stamp out the tongues of flame upon his clothes, and dragging him to his feet stared into his face.

"Tuts," he said in a tone of deep disappointment. "It's only a boy."

"It's the lad who escaped," cried a soldier peering at him; "the Duke offers fifty pounds for his arrest."

"What lad?" asked the officer, eyeing Rob with some interest.

"Rob Fraser, he knows . . .," but the officer broke in, "Never mind what he knows," he said testily, "bind him and set him against the wall."

Long after when Rob was come to himself

and his eyes more accustomed to the light from the great fire he watched the officer at his supper. He was a small red-haired man with cold blue eyes and white eyebrows, for all the world like a badger, and with Campbell written all over him. It was an evil day when a Campbell could strut over the country-side at his ease.

Having finished his food and offering none to Rob, who nearly begged him for a mouthful so famished was he, the officer lit his pipe and called in his men, telling them they could sleep along the walls of the place.

Greatly affable through meat and drink he also fell into conversation, and being like most little men very anxious to show what a terrible fellow he was, with the spirit of a giant, he related the tale of the banshee of Loch Fyne, and told it so capably that the soldiers drew a little together and sent the bottle round in some uneasiness.

"It came from a lonely island," he said, "and none saw it pass over the grey face of the loch—but there was a mournful cry that seemed to be far up in the clouds and a cold wind passing like a wraith along the barren shore. Oh it was the rare one the banshee of Loch Fyne, and some said it lived in the lonely island where the dead lay, for it always passed that way, and *it never travelled alone.*"

"I don't like these Highland tales," said one Englishman with a shiver, "least of all

hereabouts. There was a ghost I've heard tell in Holmbury Hall . . .''

"Whisht to your ghosts," broke in a large Lowland Scot, whose eyes were great with the story of the banshee. "Captain here has seen the banshee, have ye no, sir ?"

Now the officer had never before claimed that privilege. It is improbable that he had ever been to the shores of Loch Fyne, being a Glen Etive man, and it is also open to question whether the dreaded banshee was not a traveller's tale. However that may be he was not prepared to disappoint his hearers at so propitious a time.

"Once—once," he replied, being a man as truthful as a lie would permit, "only once and that at midnight—a clear moon in the sky and no wind to speak of. I was a youngster at the time, barely twenty, and as reckless as could be. It was always said that the banshee rose from the ancient burial-place at twelve o'clock, and floating across the loch set out on her evil errand. There are those who heard poor Angus Campbell wailing all through a winter's night and his voice up in the clouds, 'Tha e lamhan fuar : Tha e lamhan fuar ! It has a cold, cold hand ! ' "

"My goodness," gasped the Lowlander, dragging himself nearer to the fire.

On every face about the dying blaze superstitious fear was written. Even Rob, weak

with want of food and full of misery, heard his teeth chatter at the picture the little man drew —for he was an artist in gruesome effects.

"Over I rowed," he continued, "and the whole clachan watched me go. I rowed out over the silvery loch under a rising moon, and there was no whisper of what was to come, not even the soft music that the banshee . . ."

"What was that?" gasped one of the soldiers in a trembling voice.

They all turned about and listened.

"I thought I heard a tune far away," he whispered, shaking with fright.

"Tuts," said the officer, but none too happily, "it was nothing. But the tune that the banshee plays is a queer twisted tune, and once ye hear it there's no getting away—what was that? I'll swear I heard something."

This from the little officer himself set all aquiver with agitation. Some one tried to throw some more wood on the fire and found there was none, while the two nearest to the open space in the wall drew so close to their comrades that they were hunched up together like cattle in a drove.

Rob crouched under the shadow of the wall overcome with a kindred fear. Forgotten was Muckle John—forgotten was his impending fate —there only remained the dreaded banshee and the far away haunting echo of a tune, and the strangeness of the place they were in.

"Come, come," said the officer with some attempt at soothing them, "it's queer the way the courage goes in these forlorn places. As I was saying I lay watching the great tombstone that the moonlight rested upon, when I heard a bit ripple of music that fairly made the flesh creep on my bones and my hair stand up quite crisp and prickling. And will ye believe me the stone of the tomb began to rise . . ."

"Listen!" screamed Rob.

His shrill warning acted on them like an electric shock. They scrambled to their feet in a perfect paroxysm of terror. And then far away like a ghostly measure sounded a lilting, ghastly melody. Ghastly it sounded in that dim place with only the sullen red light upon the broken, haunted walls—ghastly just because it was a trifling mocking catch of tune played in a grim and heartless manner.

But more was to come.

"Let us get out of here," groaned one of the Englishmen in a hoarse voice, but he spoke too late.

For before their starting eyes the top of the massive tomb began to lift—lift—lift, and the tune to grow clearer coming ever nearer like a man marching slowly into their midst.

Then there was such a scene as that lonely moor had never seen before and will never see again. For with one united howl of terror they rushed together for the door. And first of them all

was the little officer. Into the silent night they tore, tripping, falling, never daring to look back, but set on reaching Fort Augustus in the swiftest possible manner.

Only once did the little officer pause, having fallen head-first into a bog, and as he scrambled out he heard (or says he heard) the thing at his very heels floating ten feet from the ground and playing as it came.

Rob unable to fly was forced to a bravery he did not relish. And so with tightly closed eyes and his head buried under a tuft of grass he prepared for the end. Look at that dreadful sight again he would not. He heard the mad tumult of the flying soldiers—he caught a loud bang like a heavy door clanging to—he listened with trembling limbs to the ghostly melody dying upon the moor.

And then back again he caught the sound of footsteps, and he knew that the banshee was come to eat him at its leisure.

It was groping across the floor towards him. Now it was touching him. Its hands were as cold as the little officer had said.

"Rob!" said Muckle John, shaking him.

He uttered a muffled cry partly because of his mouth being so stuffed with grass, partly through the shock of it all, but mostly because it was all so unexpected.

Muckle John said nothing but cut him free, and taking the strips of rope threw them on the fire.

"Should they ever come back, which will only be by day if at all," he said, "they will know that it ate ye up every scrap. But I'm doubting if they will. Let us make up the fire, Rob, and take our sleep, for there'll be few meddling us awhile."

"But how could you do it, Muckle John?"

He put some sticks upon the embers and began to eat the remnants of the soldiers' supper.

"Did I no say there is always a way, Rob, div ye but find it. There are few places hereabouts that I do not know, Rob, and maybe that's in my favour. But if I was to say that the tombstone is no tombstone at all, and that Macrea is merely a manner of speech, I'll allow I might seem to have deceived ye. But just as the fox, bless him, knows his hiding-place before he sets ahunting, so I, Rob, have made wee preparations long syne. They may come in useful some day, and when I lay hid in that same stone in the year '41 for a private matter, I was glad enough to have taken the precaution."

"What was that for?" asked Rob, his head nodding with sleep.

But Muckle John only handed him a bannock and a cup of water from the burn.

"That would be telling," he said, and wrapping himself up in his plaid he sat blinking at the fire.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DANCE OF THE MACKENZIES

DURING the mending time of Muckle John's ankle they lay hid in the broken castle, and such a tale was told about the banshee that the place was given a wide berth. Each of the four soldiers related the terrible experience to a dozen other soldiers and those added a trifle of their own and handed it on so that within a day the whole of Fort Augustus knew of it, and soon it was spreading to the searching parties amongst the hills and within a week Edinburgh was posting it down to London.

Many, indeed, scoffed at the thing but, as none came to give the banshee a personal test—the desire of Muckle John for absolute quiet was gratified. The castle was treated with profound respect for fully a century afterwards.

It fell to Rob to scour the neighbouring country at night for food, and so a week passed peacefully enough, and one evening with a promise of fine weather and a starlit night they prepared to set out again.

"Let us make for Loch Carron, Rob," said Muckle John, "the country thereabouts is clear of troops and when we hear news of a French ship in the Sound of Sleat we can go south."

"Must we go to France, Muckle John?"

"That or Holland, Rob—but only for a while. This will all blow over, and when you have grown a beard, back you will come and none will know ye."

"But won't you return too?"

"I? That depends, Rob, I doubt but the country will be too quiet for me. The Highlands are no what they were. I mind the day when a gentleman could lift a few head of cattle at his good pleasure. But there'll be little of that soon, Rob, and I was not brought up to trade like a lowland bailie."

Somewhat depressed by such a prospect, Muckle John sighed, and so they set out again and reached Glen Affrick before the dawn. There they lay hid under the shelter of a crag until the evening, when they set out as before and two days later halted on the shores of Loch Carron, having encountered no dangers on the road.

At the head of the lock was a small, mean-looking inn, and outside, sitting on their haunches, half a dozen rough-looking men—swarthy, black-haired fellows in the Mackenzie tartan. They were chattering together like monkeys as Muckle John and Rob approached, but on seeing them they fell silent and stared at them both with hostile, insolent eyes. There was not a man there who did not think of Culloden the moment he saw them—Muckle

John with his limp and Rob with hunted Jacobite written all over him. There was little welcome for strangers in those days when a body of red-coats on the smallest pretext might burn an unoffending village to the ground.

But they said nothing, glowering up at them under their shaggy brows.

Muckle John took them in at a glance. He read just what was in their minds, and with a quiet good-day he passed them and entered the inn.

"Rob," he whispered, "not a move till I tell ye."

A haggard old woman was sitting upon a stool before the peats. She raised her eyes and stared at them both for a time without speech—then something in the build of Muckle John set her staring afresh until he bent his head and looked into her lined, yellow face.

"Tha sibh an so," she cried huskily, "you here?"

"Whisht!" said Muckle John, "how is it with you, Sheen?"

She crooned at the name he used.

"It is well," she replied, "but what of you—and what is it I can do?"

"Tell me, Sheen," said he, "what of this place—is it safe?"

She shook her head.

"There is death here," she said, "Neil Mackenzie is back from the wars—he is new

come from the pursuit of the Prince—you must fly, and the boy with you. Did they see you outside ? "

He nodded, with his eyes on the door.

" We are awaiting news from France," he said, " how can we leave here—they would overtake us."

Over the face of the old woman there crept a look of fear.

" Hark ! " she said, " there are footsteps along the road."

They all stood listening intently.

Nearer and nearer came the thud of feet.

" It is himself," she whispered, " Neil Mackenzie new come from Skye."

Muckle John smiled grimly.

" From the frying-pan into the fire, Rob," said he, and sat down beside the fire.

Out upon the roadway they heard muffled voices and once a man's face looked in at the window-hole and disappeared very sharply.

As for Muckle John he appeared greatly interested in the peats upon which he was sitting.

Suddenly there appeared in the doorway a man of about fifty, of middle height, but with the broadest shoulders and chest that Rob had ever seen. He was in full Highland dress, with a claymore at his side, and one hand rested on the hilt of it and the other on his hip. His attitude was cool and insolent. His features were broad and coarse and his smooth,

clean-shaven face over fat and pink, but there was no denying the spirit of the man. His eyes were full of it—that, and an ugly malice.

Muckle John glanced at him very casually and fell to examining his finger-nails, while Rob stared at the stranger in open wonder.

Behind the man in the doorway there clustered a half-dozen dirty Mackenzies like cattle beasts nosing at a gate.

Neil Mackenzie, for he it was, set about ordering a drink for himself and then sitting down upon a stool he stared at Muckle John in the same insolent manner, while into the room trooped the men from the roadside, intent on the sport. They had seen Neil at this game before. He was the rare one to lay a stranger by the heels.

"Maybe you've travelled far the day?" he asked in a voice like the bark of a fox.

Muckle John looked him over slowly.

"Maybe," he replied, and warmed his hands at the peats.

Mackenzie stirred upon his stool.

"You are not the only one on the road with a hacked ankle to-day," he said.

"A hacked ankle," retorted Muckle John, "is mair consoling than a hewn head."

So far they had spoken in Scots, but now, as though to let his men hear how the matter went, Mackenzie rose to his feet and swaggering

across to Rob gave him a cuff on the head and said :

" Whose young bantam are you, lad, and what kind of tartan is that for the Mackenzie country ? "

Now Rob was not the one to take blows from any one, least of all before a crowd of jeering strangers, and had Muckle John not given him a look there is no saying but that he might have acted rashly.

" There are times," answered Muckle John, " when a man is grateful for small mercies."

Instantly Mackenzie grew very red and took to breathing quickly, like all Highlanders in a passion.

" I seem to know your face," said he, " but I do not know the tartan you wear."

" It is a strange people you are," said Muckle John, " who do not know a bard when you see one."

" A bard," echoed Mackenzie, " then sing or play," and he laughed at the rest of them and winked for what was to follow.

" My boy here carries my instrument," he said, and he drew Rob aside under pretence of conferring with him.

" Rob," he whispered, " hark to the tune that runs just so," and he hummed a bar, " maybe it will be called ' Mackenzie's Dance.' When I have played it once do as I tell," and he laid his mouth close to the boy's ear. " Make your

way out and take the old woman with ye, for she can give you a hand."

Then, turning on the Mackenzies, he smiled like a man on a pleasant errand, and standing with his back to the fire began to sing, and at the first note a strange hush fell over the Mackenzies, for none had ever listened to singing like that.

The sun had set an hour since and the grey mist of the gloaming was creeping over the loch and along the beach. Far out at sea a boat was heading shorewards. Muckle John saw it through the open window-space. It was a boat swiftly rowed and carrying a flag at the stern. Mackenzie was watching it too—a derisive smile upon his lips. And as Muckle John sang he saw the smile and measured the distance that divided the boat from the land with a swift glance.

"Brawly sung," cried the Mackenzies, laughing in their sleeves at the rude awakening the stranger would have.

Muckle John paused a moment and drew his whistle out of his pocket.

"If you were to give me the space of an elbow," said he, "I would play you a tune."

"Way there," cried Mackenzie, and they fell back, leaving a passage to the door.

At that Muckle John broke into a lament called "The Glen of Tears," and in the wail of it was the sadness of twilight and the story

of it was the passing of years. Sorrow—sorrow and the old days that are gone for always—backwards and forwards went Muckle John and tears trickled down the cheeks of the Mackenzies, while Neil, their leader, hung his head and said in his mind, "We will not fall on him yet, but wait awhile until we have heard another tune."

And all the time the boat was nearing the shore.

Without pausing Muckle John swung out a reel, and so brisk was his way with the fingering and so lively the measure that they fell to dancing there and then, turning and hooching, and best of them Neil Mackenzie, a scoundrel if ever there was one.

None noticed how Muckle John had reached the open doorway. It was only the pause that he made (which was pure reckless madness of him) until they found themselves staring at each other shamefacedly and looking at Neil to see what was in his mind. But he only grinned, thinking of the rare joke that was coming and nodded to Muckle John.

"Go on," he shouted.

Muckle John bowed his head. On his lips was a dangerous smile.

"I will play a tune," said he, "called 'The Dance of the Mackenzies'—it came running in my head an hour back."

"It is the quick mind he has," muttered a black Mackenzie to his neighbour.

"I am not liking the look in his eyes," was the reply, "he is no fool that big man."

But Muckle John was already fingering his whistle, and it was certainly a taking tune and yet with something queer about it—something that made them glance at each other under their eyes for dread of they knew not what.

And Neil Mackenzie started from his lethargy too late.

For at the last bar there was the noise of crackling upon the roof—and the thatch was in a blaze.

With a shout he drew his sword and rushed for the door, but the stranger was ready for him and no man in the Highlands single-handed could hold his own for a minute against the long claymore of Muckle John. He stood in the narrow doorway leaning a little forward, and with a dirk in his left hand.

"Dance!" he shouted derisively as the noise of the fired thatch grew to a sullen roar. "Dance, you dogs!" and flicking the claymore from Neil Mackenzie's hand he ran him through the sword arm.

Then they came at him altogether, a bristling, snarling crowd, armed with dirks only and helpless against his long blade. He drove them back with harsh laughter—fought them back into the blinding smoke, and standing in the doorway burst into song again, putting words to the tune he had played. In a stricken silence

they listened, while out in the darkness a boat on the loch halted and rested oars watching the red flames curling up into the night.

"Dance—dance on the feet of fire!" sang Muckle John, "Mackenzies tripping it brawly."

Suddenly from the room where the smoke was dense and black a voice called on him to hear them. It was Neil himself.

"What do you want with us?" he cried.

Muckle John stared into the mirk.

"Throw out your arms," said he, "and you, Neil Mackenzie, come out first and stand on one side."

There was an instant clatter of dirks and one broadsword.

"Rob," cried Muckle John, "take this man away there and pistol him if he shows mischief, though I sliced his arm prettily enough."

Then turning back, Muckle John collected the arms together and called on the Mackenzies to come out. This they did readily enough, gasping and coughing in the glare of the fire, and rubbing the smart of it from their aching eyes.

Seeing that they meditated no attack Muckle John threw their dirks into the blazing house, and then marched up to them.

"I am taking your chief," he said, "as a safeguard. If I am followed I will claymore him as surely as my name is Muckle John."

"Muckle John!" they cried aghast.

"I thought he was no ordinary man," said the black Mackenzie to his neighbour.

"Muckle John!" repeated the other, "it is the rare fools we have been, Angus—I think I will be getting home."

"Come," said Muckle John to Neil Mackenzie, and without a word they started.

But of a sudden Muckle John stopped in his tracks.

"Rob," he said, "make due south, keeping the sea-line and halt two miles away on the shore. I have business here," and turning back he disappeared in the darkness.

Near the wrecked cottage he found the old woman weeping silently.

"Sheen, poor woman," he said, "it is not my father's son would ruin you who know my secret."

"You are still nameless?"

"Still nameless, Sheen, until I meet the man who killed my father."

"Who will he be?"

"Who, indeed? But I shall know him. I go abroad again when I can. Some day perhaps I shall come across him. They say he had a horror of the 'The Pedlars' Reel'—it was the tune my father died with in his throat, and it is the tune, Sheen, that I play whenever I meet such a man as he may be."

The old woman touched his arm.

"There is doom coming up the shore," she said, "I can feel it on the wind."

"The boat," said Muckle John, "who was coming so fast in the boat?"

"I do not know, but there is death in the air."

Muckle John caught her arm.

"Here," said he, "take this—it is a trifle but it will buy you another cottage, Sheen. Good-bye—it is long till we shall meet again."

He stepped past her and crept towards the beach. On the shore the boat was beached, and several men were scrambling up the sand. One, a tall thin man with a heavy cloak about him and a stick in his hand, was supported by two sailors.

Muckle John crept closer. Some Mackenzies were running to meet the newcomer full of what had happened.

He listened to the tale they told the tall man, who seemed so faint with illness or the sea that he had to sit down to hear them.

"Who was this man that Mackenzie sent for us to take?" asked one, the captain of a frigate evidently.

"Muckle John!" cried a voice.

At that new life seemed to stream into the crouching, broken figure on the sand.

"Muckle John!" he cried.

It was the voice of Captain Strange!

All that night Muckle John and Rob sped

towards the south, and at the dawn they reached the country of the Macraes, where they parted with Mackenzie, and headed for the shores of Loch Hourn.

There on a desolate, rain-lashed moor, with salt upon the wind, and the sea birds crying over their heads, Muckle John called a halt.

It was near the end of May, but a bitter day even for Loch Hourn.

"Where do we go now?" asked Rob, shivering with cold.

"Where, indeed, for now we are driven into the English line of march and Knoidart was the last place I hankered after. It is better that we should take different roads, Rob, we've travelled too long together. Make you for the south, Rob, and if all goes well wait news for me outside Leith. There is a gibbet there—shall we say this day month, and if I do not come then just go your ways and never say what took you there. And, Rob, change that kilt and for mercy's sake cover your legs with breeks and decent hose, for the like of you would be recognized from end to end of Scotland. They want you, Rob, never forget that—they want you as a rebel, but that's havers; as a prison breaker, but that's neither here nor there—they want you just because you ken where Lovat lies hid, and what came to the treasure of Arkaig. What did come to that same

treasure, Rob? Where was it buried or was it not buried at all?"

"I cannot say," replied Rob, "for I do not know."

Muckle John sighed and then shaking him by the hand addressed the far distance with a pensive and melancholy gaze.

"Whether a man is mair injudicious as a fool or a knave must ever be a matter of argument," he mused aloud, "but I ken fine which I would have ye be, Rob," and shaking his head he began to move away.

Suddenly, however, he paused and coming back more quickly led Rob down to the edge of the loch.

"Tell me," he said, "what is there to prevent me from putting you in there?"

"Nothing," said Rob, "but I do not see what you would gain by that—I tell you I know nothing of the treasure. It was hid while I sat upon the beach."

Muckle John shook his head in the same forlorn fashion.

"I hardly like to leave you, Rob," said he sadly, "there are times when I wonder whether you are to be trusted alone. Many men would say you were daffing, Rob—but there's honesty written all over your face. I once met another just like yersel' so I know. It's a terrible responsibility to be so honest, Rob—it maks other folk uncomfortable. Good-bye to ye, Rob,

and here's some siller just in case you are hungry or want a night's lodging. But be careful of the wandering bodies Rannoch way, for they'd cut your throat for a nod and follow you to London for the clink of a bawbee."

"Good-bye," said Rob, "where do you go now, Muckle John?"

"I make for Arisaig," he replied, "I have a debt to pay."

"A debt?"

"Not so surprised, Rob, no man pays his just debts like Muckle John. Dirk for dirk—shot for shot—chase for chase—there is no honester soul than Muckle John."

Rob laughed, though a trifle faint-heartedly, and in that manner they parted, Muckle John passing rapidly southwards while Rob watched him fade into the dreary landscape and become lost in the cold sea mist.

CHAPTER XX

AN UNWILLING ACCOMPLICE

It was at the corner of Church Street on the week following the engagement at Glenmoriston, that Miss Macpherson, busied about a few purchases, stopped very sharply opposite the tavern of Major James Fraser (commonly known as Castleleathers) and peered with signs of agitation at a printed paper hung in the window. A casual onlooker would never have known Miss Macpherson was even faintly moved by what she read, but a close observer would have seen her mouth close tightly, her brows droop over her keen eyes, her hands clutch the parcels in her arms spasmodically. It was enough to startle any woman. Indeed, most people would have lost their heads, and done something foolish.

For the contents of the paper were principally devoted to a personal description of one "Rob Fraser, a rebel at large, dressed in a kilt of the Fraser tartan with a dark coat—sixteen years and over—of strong build and dark-haired, who was in arms against the Government at Culloden and has since broken prison from Fort Augustus, skulked with desperate rebels and recently killed, in company with one called Muckle John, a notorious Jacobite, a number of his Majesty's

forces in the country of Glenmoriston. Whoever shall lay the said Rob Fraser by the heels shall receive the sum of fifty pounds," and so on.

There was much more, but Miss Macpherson, sick at heart, walked slowly away. It would not do for her to be seen reading the thing. Her mind was stunned for a moment. She did not notice where she went, or the passers-by. It was only when she knocked against a great man standing at the corner of the street that she started and looked up.

It was Castleleathers.

She knew him slightly as a distant cousin of Rob's father, but would have gone on her way had he not greeted her.

"A fine day, Miss Macpherson," he said loudly, as a couple of soldiers tramped past them along the road, and then in a low tone, "have you news of Rob?"

"No," she replied, "and no news is like to be good news in these times. What set him meddling with such things—the feckless loon?"

He jerked his head towards his house.

"Come away in," he whispered, "we must see what can be done."

Together they entered the place and going upstairs came to an upper room.

He was a very heavy, red-faced, helpless kind of man. His massive incompetence under stress of emergency irritated her to tartness.

"It was here Rob met that soft-spoken gomeril, Muckle John," she snapped.

"Aye, that it was," he replied, nodding moodily.

"And I suspect the man who gave him my address that evening, Major Fraser."

"Dear me, Miss Macpherson, ye say so?"

"That I do, my man, and what's more he's in this very room."

With a pathetic simulation of surprise Castleleathers made as though to look over his shoulder.

"It's yersel'," said Miss Macpherson coldly.

He tried to meet her stony stare, but failed.

"When ye mention it," he began like a man struggling to recall a distant event, "when ye mention it, maybe I did say I was second cousin to Rob who lived with his aunt near by—I'm no denying anything mind ye, I merely say maybe I did in the course of conversation, a pleasantry madam, a bit of gossip . . ."

"It's like to be a dear bit of gossip for Rob," she retorted, "and that no so far away."

"Tuts! you take too serious a view. It will all blow over—all blow over. There has been trouble before, I mind the '15, it was just the same, and before a few months had passed all the folk were going about their ways just the same and keeping their claymores oiled for the next time. Rob is a lad of spirit, Miss Macpherson, and they will not take him."

But she was not listening to him. She was

revolving in the depths of her mind some kind of plan, any sort of crazy plan that would save Rob. The day when he could have surrendered and escaped with a few months' imprisonment was past; he was now a notorious rebel still in arms, and associated with desperate leaders amongst the rebel army. There was no hope of shielding him until better days. It must be escape across the sea—or a pardon. But the idea of a pardon was, of course, absurd.

"What can we do?" she said in a kind of restrained despair.

Castleleathers blinked.

"We?" he repeated vaguely. "I fear that I . . ."

But she froze him with a single look.

"I am in no mind for argument," she said, "and our business is to get Rob free. I have at the back of my head a plan of a kind, but it will need sleeping on."

"But I cannot risk my neck even to assist you, Miss Macpherson."

"My man," she replied grimly, "you will risk your neck if you don't. Who shielded Muckle John, that desperate rogue, in Inverness under Lord Loudon's verra nose but just yersel'?"

"How did ye know?" he whispered, much taken aback.

"I didna," she replied comfortably, "but I suspected as much."

"He was an old friend."

"That would tickle the ears of the Duke, he has a sair grudge against Muckle John, he told me so himsel'. He said he'd willingly hang any one who gave him shelter."

Castleleathers shrank back.

"He said that did he?" he murmured aghast.

She nodded her head.

"He's no sae sure of you as it is," she added.

He appeared considerably dejected at this, and said again and again that he did not know what could be done at all.

"We must compel him to sign a pardon," said Miss Macpherson, "we must put the fear of death upon him, Castleleathers. You are a very large, powerful man, as great in the chest as Muckle John himsel'"— she paused, eyeing him keenly—"my certes," she cried, "but there's a notion for you . . . could ye no let on you were Muckle John?"

"I . . . Muckle John? *My dear lady . . .*"

"You are fatter than he and without his spirit of course, but how can the Duke tell that? I have a friend inside the Fort, a Macpherson, third cousin to my mother's step-daughter and a douce quiet man. He would do what he can though he has a sound respect for his neck."

"I am with him there," sighed Castleleathers. "I hope, madam, that you propose nothing rash."

"My man," she said stoutly, "when my

blood's up I stick at nothing, be it Duke or gibbet."

After that there fell a most melancholy silence. The major, who had hoped to spend a peaceful old age, and who had stepped like a cat among puddles during the last disturbance, wished Muckle John far enough and Miss Macpherson much farther.

The whole heart of the warm fire (and it was a chill day) seemed to have fallen into thin ashes. He shivered dismally and took a dreary relish in praying that he might catch his death of cold.

Once he screwed his eye slowly about and let it rest moodily upon Miss Macpherson. But she was absorbed in her scheming, and that is a game that comes painfully to untutored persons.

"I see nothing for it," she said at last, "but just to shoot him."

"The Duke?" gasped Castleleathers.

"Who else—he'd be no loss. There's little of the William Wallace in you, my man."

"I am not wanting in personal courage," groaned Castleleathers, "indeed, I have seen service abroad, but this is beneath me, madam—quite beneath me."

Miss Macpherson leaped at a grim jest to bring him to his senses.

"There'll be nothing beneath ye if you don't," she said swiftly.

He recoiled from such a pleasantry. He had

always deplored the brutality of utter frankness.

"Who knows," he said thoughtfully, "but a little playful threatening might not win our purpose, just a pistol waving carelessly in the hand, and a claymore at the side, the iron hand under the velvet glove, madam—ye take me?"

"I'll take ye right enough," said Miss Macpherson, "if Rob's life depends on us two, there'll be no shirking."

"If only my heart were in the work," sighed the major pensively, "I would not care a bawbee for the Duke or ony body. Could you not get in touch with Muckle John, the Duke is feared of him belike . . ."

"My man," broke in Miss Macpherson, "you are slow in the uptake, *you* are to be Muckle John."

He raised his head at that in a speechless tragedy of silence.

"*Me?*" he whispered. "*Me Muckle John*—oh, what is this nonsense you propose?"

"I have not decided upon it at random," she replied, "and it seems practicable. I have some knowledge of the Duke's habits, and let us but once get him alone and we will force him to sign a pardon for Rob. He goes south soon, so we must act at once. You, Castleleathers, must wrap yersel' up in a plaid to your nose and when we find him by himsel' you shall threaten his life."

"But you—where will you be?"

"I shall be watching ye—never fear—meet me to-morrow and we'll journey south. The final plans I'll devise, and dinna fail me or I'll tell the Duke how ye knew Lovat himsel', and they'll take ye to London as a witness."

"No, no," cried the major in a panic of fright, "I will be there never fear, but it's like I'll see London in a very different capacity."

CHAPTER XXI

THE CAPTURE OF LORD LOVAT

As weeks passed on and still the searchers did not come Lord Lovat's hopes rose, and schemes no doubt began to run through his mind for a continuance of the struggle or a reconciliation with the Government. It may have occurred to him to send a diplomatic message to the Duke of Cumberland at Fort Augustus, but there is no evidence to show whether he took any definite steps until it was too late.

For long after the fateful visit of Murray of Broughton he had been prepared for immediate flight, but as time passed and nothing occurred to alarm him he took to sitting in the sun or playing a hand of cards, or brooding inside the cottage upon the transience of all human greatness.

There were with him about a score of Frasers, all armed with musket and sword, and Bishop Hugh Macdonald, who did not desert the old man in his hour of need.

It was on the first of June that the sloop *Furnace and Terror* conveying a detachment of soldiers from the garrison of Fort William, came sailing down the coast of Knoidart and Arisaig. There they landed soldiers who

began to march inland, making for Loch Morar.

It was on the north side of the loch that they espied a man making his way along the sea-shore—a very tall man who limped as he ran, being surprised in an open patch of country. Giving pursuit they spread out along the hill to cut him off, but when the man on the shore saw them he went away at a great pace, and had it not been that the loch curves outwards so as to make escape the more difficult, he might have gained the head of it, and won free. To avoid falling into their hands, however, he took to the loch and set out swimming for an island in the middle of it, making good headway before even they could get within shooting range.

And then, while they hunted for a boat, he scrambled upon the wooded shore and disappeared.

Lord Lovat was sitting before his cottage as the swimmer waded ashore. He looked up having dozed in the sunlight and fallen asleep.

Facing him, with water dripping from his clothes, was Muckle John.

For a moment he blinked, and then perceiving that the soldiers on the mainland were pushing a boat on to the loch he shrugged his shoulders.

"I was awaiting you," he remarked quietly, "but I did not look for red-coats! Even Murray, your last messenger, came alone."

Muckle John shook the water from his coat.

"Had I known you were here," he said, "I would rather have been taken."

Lovat was greatly puzzled, so puzzled he could only gape at him.

"Come," went on Muckle John, "there is not a moment to be lost. Get you into a boat, and away with you. Leave a dozen of your men here, we can hold them back awhile. But when you reach the mainland consider yourself no longer safe from me."

Lovat grinned at that.

"How you fight who's to have my poor body," he replied. "What if I stay quietly here? If it must be one or other, better Fort William, where I shall at least be protected from you."

"My lord," returned Muckle John, "you estimate Fort William over highly. But let that pass—come, sir, if you will not move I'll put you in a boat by force. They are half-way across. Will you rise or no?"

Very slowly Lovat got upon his legs.

"I'll go," he said simply, and crossing to the other side of the island permitted himself to be helped into a boat, and rowed to the Arisaig side.

For the next hour there raged a battle royal between the red-coats and the Frasers under Muckle John. Again and again they tried to take the island by storm but the fierce fire of

the defending force drove them back to firing over the sides of their boats, and in the confusion no thought was given to the rear of the island and the flight of Simon, Lord Lovat.

At last in a brief respite Muckle John ordered the Frasers to the boats and pushing off they rowed with all haste out of range of the island upon which the English landed in due course.

On reaching the mainland Muckle John said farewell to the Frasers and limping into the shadows of the trees went his way. But late that night in a cave upon the side of Glen Morar he took the third piece of Fraser tartan from his sporran and threw it into the fire.

"It is a reckoning," he said in his heart, "that is more fitted for English hands than mine."

Near Meoble on the seventh day of June the soldiers came upon Lord Lovat hiding in a hollow tree. He had dismissed his followers in order to lead his pursuers off the trail. Quite alone, sitting upon his strong box, he surrendered his sword with his customary dignity and permitted himself to be taken on board the sloop *Furnace*.

As he was assisted up the side he encountered Captain Strange looking over the bulwark. Well he knew Strange's reputation as a spy and secret agent.

"I am sorry to see your lordship in this

plight," said Strange with an undercurrent of malice in his voice.

Behind Lovat they brought his strong box, and when he saw it there he pursed his lips, but said nothing.

"The men report they were on the trail of Muckle John a day or two since," resumed Strange meaningly, "anything your lordship can tell us will not be forgotten. He is a dangerous man."

"My memory," replied Lovat slowly, "is so short that I cannot recollect. Was it Muckle John? He seemed a small fair man to me, but my eyes ye ken are no what they were."

"I understand," said Strange grimly, and led the way down to the cabin.

There Captain Duff and Captain Ferguson were awaiting them. And on the table lay the strong box over which Lovat had pored so many hours on the night of Culloden at Gortuleg.

Lovat was allowed to seat himself, and having done so appeared oblivious to the proceedings, and seemed to doze. In the box were many articles of personal value to him and these the searchers passed over. But near to the bottom of the box was a bundle of papers, and these they grabbed at and began to read.

At that point Lovat stirred and looking up remarked: "You will find nothing treasonable there . . ." watching them with a half smile on his lips.

But of a sudden he paled and leant forward.

In the hand of Captain Strange was a letter, in the Master of Lovat's writing. In some manner that fatal communication had been overlooked.

"Will you let me look at that letter?" asked the old man smoothly.

Strange hesitated and saw the tension in his eyes.

"I fear," he replied, "this must remain in the hands of the Government."

Lovat sank into his chair and shook his great white head in a melancholy way.

"I am too old," he said hardly above his breath.

"My lord," said Strange, "this letter is incriminating in the highest degree. Have you recollected yet whether it was Muckle John you met upon the island on Loch Morar?"

Lovat put one fat hand to his ear.

"I cannot catch what you say," he remarked blandly.

Strange repeated his question.

"I am sorry," said Lovat, "but at my age deafness is very prevalent."

And so in due course they took him to Fort William, carrying him in a litter, finding him very querulous over the bumpy places, and apt to gibe at them in Latin to his own cynical pleasure and their vague annoyance.

CHAPTER XXII

MISS MACPHERSON AND THE DUKE

On the brow of the high ground close to Fort Augustus there sat a solitary man wrapped to his nose in a great Highland plaid. Night was falling and a thin drizzle of rain coming out of the west. The black outline of hills closed about the Fort as though to overwhelm it. No sound there was but the weary dripping of rain and the noise of running water over stones.

The figure on the mist-ridden hill-side never moved, but remained as lifeless as the crag behind him—part as it were of the tragic twilight.

Down in the Fort lights flickered here and there, and a horseman plunged out of the obscure light and entered the gates.

The man upon the hill never raised his head but watched him for all that, the rain pouring from his bonnet to his plaid and running in little streams upon the heather.

A bugle sounded down below. Following hard on its muffled notes came the clanging of the gates.

The Fort was closed for the night.

The swift darkness of a Highland night smoothed out the ragged line of mountain,

obliterating with its travelling shadows the outlines of the desolate glen, the clumps of trees about the low-lying country and in a flash the man upon the hill. He had become in a breath of time inseparably of the night itself.

Long after a clear whistle sounded from the pathway below. It was followed by a softer longer whistle.

With a sigh the man upon the hill gained his feet, being very stiff and cold with waiting, and passing over the sodden heather stood looking about him into the mist. Presently two figures loomed into sight.

The first of them, wrapped like the man himself in the folds of a heavy plaid, addressed him in a familiar voice.

It was Miss Macpherson.

"Come, Castleleathers," she said, "here is the man Macpherson, he is letting a rope over the wall, and he has arranged all. The Duke expects a visitor from the west this very night or maybe to-morrow and he will be alone. Things are no so strict as they were, and there is a rumour that he goes south soon. He thinks the Highlands are crushed. . . ."

"The German loon," snapped Castleleathers with much contempt, "he cannot tell the difference between a Hessian and a Macdonald."

"Come," said Miss Macpherson, "and say ye do not think hardly of me if anything goes wrong."

He took her hand and gave it a crunch.

"Tuts!" he said. "I'm no easy to move, but I like a ploy at a time. I feel younger to-night than I've felt this ten years. He's only a wee bit German after all."

Without another word they reached the Fort, and Macpherson, who seemed a capable man though silent as a dyke, passed through the gateway and disappeared.

They skirted the outer rampart noiselessly and taking up their stand some hundred yards beyond the entrance gates, awaited the rope.

A few minutes later and down it came, and steadying Miss Macpherson for fear she grew giddy and fell, they began to mount together, and reached the top. There all was very dark and quiet, and the mist obscured everything outside the reach of a man's arm.

The garrison had long since grown careless now that the Highland forces had been utterly dispersed and crushed. Even the Duke was growing lukewarm in persecution and anxious to bid farewell to the land of snow and mist and hear what London had to say to him for his brave doings. At that very moment he sat toasting his toes before a grand peat fire with a log or two to give it flame, a glass of mulled wine at his elbow.

The room in which he sat was very small and compact, the shutters drawn, and the seat in which he dozed one he had procured from

the wreckage of a chief's house—a massive cushioned chair—with a back so high that it took a big man to see who entered the room.

He had dined as well as Highland rations would permit, and, like all Germans, he loved his food. He also relished the hour following his dinner. He had a kind of reverence for that sacred time.

To lounge before the fire on that dreary night of cold rain and mist, a night fit only for Highland cattle and suchlike, had its compensations. The last few months had brought their burden of anxiety and fatigue. The eve of Culloden had been enough to try any man's nerve. Had he lost—had he been taken or killed—there is little question that the English Crown would have changed hands. Perhaps he had been over hard on the barbarous people who had rebelled, but he was frightened. Looking back on it now, he saw that he had lost his head for a time. And now the country was subdued. He could return and listen to the things that London was waiting to say. There would be flags and banquets and honours. England was at his feet. Labour accomplished successfully has, indeed, its consolations.

He stirred the fire and listened to the crackle of the wood. It was a fine, brisk, homely noise on such a wretched night of driving rain and sleet. It was good to feel the rare glow of it on one's feet and knees. He wondered

why it seemed so much better on a night of storm. He hunted in his mind for a reason. Suddenly he chuckled. He remembered the Young Pretender, sheltering for all he knew under a ledge of dripping rock, or in a byre for cattle. Bad weather cut two ways. It had its comforts for the victor—it lashed the fugitive most piteously.

He laughed outright at the notion. Where was he now, that silly young man? Yet not so young—his own age in solemn truth. Then all the more credit to himself. Where was he now, but on some open moor like a curlew in the night or a stag watching the way he had run.

His eyes shut and suddenly a snore rang through the firelit room.

At the same moment a tall and heavily plaided figure passed noiselessly across the space that divided the door from the table and stood there for a moment as though undecided in his mind what course to take. In the doorway there hung a heavy curtain. Behind this there was another form. One could see that by the curve of it inside the room.

On the table there lay a paper—a despatch apparently, and this the man behind the chair looked at idly with his thoughts upon the silent figure sunk in slumber.

But as he read he frowned, and then, very softly he gathered up the paper and returned to

the doorway where his companion appeared, and together they passed out of sight.

In an adjoining room they paused, and together bent over the dispatch. It was dated two days since, from Loch Carron, and signed by Captain Strange. It stated that Neil Mackenzie had encountered Muckle John and Rob Fraser in the inn of Loch Carron, and in an attempt to capture them had suffered both in body and reputation, and that unless he was permitted to take vengeance upon them he and his following would cease to interest themselves in the business of the Government further. That Neil Mackenzie, himself, was even now journeying to Fort Augustus to explain the matter, and that he advised that it might reflect less on the Government if the affair was left in Highland hands. The remainder of the dispatch dealt with the state of the district, the capture of Lord Lovat, and concluded with the words: "There are reasons why it would be expedient if neither Muckle John or Rob Fraser stood their trial, but were reduced to silence by some other course, in fact if your Highness could see your way to disarming their suspicions and the suspicions of the Jacobites in some way, it would leave the road clear for Mackenzie."

"This Mackenzie," whispered Miss Macpherson, "is like to be the end of Rob I'm thinking. It is evident that he has suffered at the hands of Muckle John. . . ."

"And means mischief," added Castleleathers.

In the room down the passage the snores of the Duke rolled peacefully on.

Miss Macpherson paused, turning the matter over in her practical mind.

"Have you ever seen this Neil Mackenzie?" she asked at last.

He shook his head.

"I never had dealings with Mackenzies," he replied.

"Then why not take his place, my man? The Duke canna tell one tartan from another. Hear what he has to say. Tell him your people are mortally offended with Muckle John."

"But what of Mackenzie himself?"

Her face hardened.

"Mackenzie must be sent upon his business," she said, "and what is more, he must never reach the Fort."

"One ploy at a time," said Castleleathers, "and here goes for the first."

With that he tip-toed back and replaced the dispatch, then with a heavy tread walked down the passage, and knocked upon the door.

"Who is there?" cried the Duke starting from sleep.

"Neil Mackenzie, your Highness."

Cumberland pushed the chair about.

In the room he saw a great man standing muffled to his face in a plaid. He had the

bearing of a robber chief, but one never knew with these terrible Highlanders.

"I 'ave 'eard ov you," said the Duke civilly enough, despite his harsh Teutonic voice, "two hours since I received a despatch from Captain Strange referring to some trouble between you and Muckle John."

"My people," said Castleleathers, turning his face to the shadow, "have received an affront which can only be wiped out in one way. We are prepared to serve the Government with loyalty and we look to your Highness to remember it."

The Duke took up the paper and read it through very carefully.

"Zey are both dangerous Jacobites," he said, "and there are reasons vy zis Muckle John should not stand 'is trial in London. He knows too much, Mr. Mackenzie. There are things we vish to keep to ourselves for a little—you understand?"

Castleleathers bowed his head.

"There is the boy too," he said.

Cumberland shrugged his shoulders.

"Now that Lovat is taken, I care nodings for 'im. But he vill serve to put you on the trail of the other."

"He is elusive, your Highness—there is no telling how we can lay hands on him unless. . ."

"Unless what?"

"Your Highness could appear to have pity on his youth and issue a pardon. It would be

an act of clemency and what followed would only point to clan jealousy."

Cumberland frowned. He was a straightforward man with an aversion for subterfuge.

"I do nod like your Highland vays," he said grumpily, "why not hang the boy in the ordinary vay? Muckle John is a different matter. I see no reason for this pardon."

Castleleathers played his last card.

"There are wheels within wheels," said he, "we know that this Muckle John has pledged his word to preserve the life of the boy. When we have the boy in our hands, for he will come home on receiving his pardon, we will have the bait for the catching of Muckle John. Two rebels will have gone, your Highness, and none the wiser. There are things this Muckle John could say that would sound badly in a trial. . . ."

"I know, I know," said Cumberland, ill at ease, "but surely there are odder vays. . . ."

Castleleathers shrugged his shoulders.

"It is all we have asked," he said, "and we are not a small clan."

The Duke noted the menace in his voice and controlled his anger with an effort.

"At anodder time," he said, "I would see you var enough, but I am sick to death of all this futile business and the wrangles of one clan with another. Have it as you will."

He strode to the table, took a piece of paper out of a drawer and began to write upon it.

"Here," he said crossly, "is ze pardon for Rob Fraser, and now let me hear no more of Muckle John."

"Your Highness has acted wisely," said Castleleathers smoothly, and a minute later took his leave.

Backwards and forwards tramped the Duke of Cumberland, his thoughts deep again upon his departure for London and the brave times ahead. Forgotten was all the hardship of the last few months—the poor fare and dreary weather. He was like a man saying a glad farewell to a desolate country of savages.

"It is but half done," whispered Castleleathers to Miss Macpherson when they stood once more upon the heather, "he has forgotten Rob and is like a man eaten up with longing for the south. I've seen such before. There is still Mackenzie. He may be upon us any minute, and what is it to be, the sword or a dunt upon the head."

"A Mackenzie," remarked Miss Macpherson, like to overflow with joy at the pardon, "is neither here nor there, but what of the swarm? You may kill one bee, but dinna forget the hive."

"True," said Castleleathers, "which way will he come?"

"He will come by this very road—I doubt but we'll meet him any minute."

It was long before they heard the sound of a horse thudding up the glen, and very soon the squelch of its feet in the sodden ground. Instantly they crouched by the way, and then as the horseman drew level with them they raised their heads and took him in at a glance. He was a very heavily built man, muffled up in a riding cloak and with a bonnet upon his head.

"A Mackenzie if ever there was one," whispered Castleleathers, and starting up came upon him from the slope of the hill and hauled him off his beast so that he uttered one startled cry and sprawled in the heather with his legs in the air. In the same grim silence, Castleleathers was upon his chest and with a dirk at his throat.

"Is it to be the quick passage," he whispered in Gaelic, "or do you swear to do what is said?"

There was a long silence.

Mackenzie upon his back and helpless as a child was trying to see the tartan of the man above him.

"Neil Mackenzie," said Castleleathers, "unless you forget what brought you here this night, you are not like to remember it at all."

"Who are you?" gasped Mackenzie, trying to see the better.

"I," replied Castleleathers, "am Muckle John."

"Muckle John?" He doubted it, but it was

black darkness where they lay amongst the heather.

"What of the affair Loch Carron way?" continued Castleleathers. "You came poorly enough out of that. But I have a mind to end it this time. I am not a patient man and no one has dealings against me who does not at last regret it."

"I will go back," said Mackenzie in a heavy tone like a man beaten once and for all.

"You must tell your people that you are satisfied with the answer the Duke has given you."

"I will—I swear it!"

Castleleathers drew back and leaped to his feet.

"Away then!" he said, "the road to the west lies clear. But if you so much as dream of treachery—no power can save you."

In silence Mackenzie caught his horse and mounting it took the road for home, all the courage gone out of him. All that night he rode, and the next day, and when he reached Loch Carron he gave no word at all, but bore the aspect of a man who fears to look over his shoulder in the gloaming.

As for Castleleathers and Miss Macpherson, being both people over middle life, they made their way stiffly homewards to an inn near Fort Augustus.

It was over a basin of hot brose that he turned to her.

"I am past ploys like these," he said, "but it smacks of the old days."

"The young ones are no like the old ones," sighed Miss Macpherson.

"None so old," rejoined Castleleathers, smiling at her suddenly.

Miss Macpherson busied herself with her plate.

"It's after Rob we must go the morn," she said.

"It has been a great night," he remarked, nodding before the fire, "that Mackenzie was sair taken aback."

"The Duke is no sae difficult to manage as folk say," hazarded Miss Macpherson.

"Young blood," grunted Castleleathers, "he only needs managing."

"You're all the same," murmured Miss Macpherson slyly.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOUSE OF THE FOUR MEN

Of the travelling of Rob to the south there is little enough to tell until he reached Rannoch, the country of Robertsons and Stewarts, and other clans more like to pick a pocket than to cry God-speed.

On the evening following the departure of Muckle John, Rob had bartered with a pedlar upon the road for a suit of old clothes, and too fearful of the future to refuse the exorbitant price demanded, he gave him some silver and buried his kilt in a mountain pool.

And so, with more confidence, he stepped out towards the south, and reached Loch Linnhe without misadventure. It was his intention to avoid all the district about Fort William by taking boat to the other side.

In this manner he passed through Glencoe and travelling by day, reached the head of Loch Rannoch in a dusk of drizzling rain.

Now the country that includes Rannoch, Lochaber and Breadalbane had no rival for insubordination in those days. It swarmed with broken men—cattle thieves and desperadoes of all kinds owning fealty to none but their own good pleasure, and only Jacobite so far

as it was politic to be, and with an unsleeping eye to the plunder of the Lowlands.

It was with anxious steps, therefore, that Rob approached a solitary huddle of buildings lying in a snug hollow of the hills, thatched to the colour of the brown trees, with here and there a patch of young heather over the top of it. It was strangely hidden and quiet, with all the look of an old inn fallen on evil days.

For long Rob stared at it with dubious eyes; there was so little life about it, and so much that was mysteriously ominous. Though drenched with the thin hill rain, craving for food and shelter, he was in a half mind to continue his way, when the face of a man looked through the small hole in the side that served for a window—a green-white face it was, with staring unwavering eyes.

But where there was a living soul there would be food and shelter and Rob stepped forward, forgetting his secret fear. Inside the place, however, there was no sound, but only the monotonous dripping of water upon the muddy floor. In the centre of the room there hung a great pot upon a chain from the roof, and the place was so full of peat reek that it took him a few minutes to see where the man had gone.

Against the wall were layers of rushes, and a narrow stairway led up to a kind of loft about six feet above the floor. Under the loft were

the cows. He could hear them coughing fitfully through the wooden partition.

It was a poor enough place and leaking from a score of holes, but it was warm, and so tired was he that he sat down before the peats and warmed his hands.

Presently the door opened and the man re-entered. Rob wondered how he had managed to come that way. He started when he saw Rob, but wished him good-day civilly enough and inquired if he could provide him with anything. He was a sallow, secretive looking fellow, with a tangled beard and hair and a terrible squint.

"You are passing south maybe," he said, busying himself about the place.

With some uneasiness Rob replied that he was journeying to Edinburgh seeking employment.

"It is a Stewart you will be?" remarked the man, squinting terribly.

"No," said Rob, "I am a Fraser."

"A Fraser," he echoed, "I take it you can pay your way."

"I can that," said Rob with some indignation for fear he should be sent back into the rain, and with a foolish notion that the man might be of assistance he drew out a dozen silver coins and clinked them in his open hand.

In the blue smoke of the place the man paused. He stood perfectly still with his ghastly

squint accentuated. Then putting some meat into the pot he set the lid on, and going to the door spoke to some one outside. This he did so casually that Rob suspected nothing, but sat dozing before the warm glow, utterly spent and stupid with fatigue.

It must have been about eight of the clock that he finished his supper, and asked to be shown to a place to sleep. This the innkeeper did very readily, lighting him up the narrow stairway into the loft and pointing to a heap of dry heather in a corner. Out in the night the rain was falling dismally and below him Rob could hear the warm and comfortable breathing of the cows. Yet, tired though he was, a curious dread of falling asleep came on him. There was something about the place that set his nerves on edge. Was it the eerie silence of it—lost amongst the lonely elbow of the loch? But that was nothing new to him. Was it the strange catlike movements of the man with the squint? But he was probably a decent enough creature unused to strangers. Or was there danger lurking in the place, memories of dreadful things done there in the black darkness? His hand instinctively sought the dirk at his side.

It was gone!

In an instant he was upon his feet. Whether the man below had stolen it or not he dare not take the risk of staying in that lonely place

unarmed. He must make his way into the night and trust to fortune that he would evade pursuit should there be any.

Very softly he felt his way about, hunting for a window or trapdoor. But there was no way of escape. Under the door leading to the stairway shone a rim of light thrown up by the peat fire below, and in one place where the wood had been eaten by mice there was a round hole large enough to command the room beneath. He lay at his length and peered down.

To his horror there were four men gathered about the fire—the innkeeper and three ragged, crouching figures, with cruelty and murder written all over their faces. They were dressed in a tartan so filthy and stained with rain and mud that Rob was ignorant of their clan. They were shaggy as cattle beasts, dirty, smoke-blackened fellows, below the average size, active as wild cats, and chattering in whispers like a crew of unwashed monkeys. Even in the remnants of the Chevalier's army Rob had not encountered such as these. Only in Lochaber and Rannoch could such scourings of the clans be found until one met the red Macgregors which Providence forfend.

The innkeeper had his back turned to the stairway, but by the motion of his hands Rob read what he said like an open page. He was telling them of the silver that he, in his rashness, had exposed.

In the red firelight Rob could see their eyes gleam beneath their matted hair. With hypnotized gaze he watched a man unsheath his dirk and make a gesture significant enough, and with a gurgle in the throat requiring no explanation. So that was to be the end of it all—a secret murder by a band of lawless caterans ready to prey upon every stranger luckless enough to beg a night's lodging. He would never see Muckle John again. It made him wonder what he would have done to save his life. Muckle John always had a way.

Down below the men had risen to their feet. He saw them standing in their own steam, their heads close together, and their beards wagging as they whispered. Then one by one they approached the stairway. A wild terror seized him at that. The soft pat of their brogues upon the rungs of the ladder and the creak of it under their weight was like to make him scream.

Starting back he stood upon the trap door in the empty hope that they would not be able to lift it. A moment, and he felt it give a faint heave under him. It was delivered gently, as though the man on the ladder suspected it would be stiff or difficult to push back.

And then there was absolute silence.

Did they suspect that he was awake? Rob listened intently. But what he heard was the innkeeper softly ordering them back, and at

that moment there sounded outside in the night a man's voice calling.

Once more Rob lay upon the floor and peered below. Around the fire the men were sitting as before. In the doorway the innkeeper was standing with the firelight upon his back. Outside there was the humid noise of a horse losing its hold in sopping ground, and again a voice called—

"Can you give me shelter?"

With a backward glance the innkeeper disappeared, leaving those crouching figures utterly silent. To Rob a wild flash of hope flamed suddenly. Who could say but this might be a friend in distress?

He heard the innkeeper open the door in the byre below him and stall the horse; but he never moved in his eagerness to watch who should enter the place. Suddenly a man looked in at the group about the fire, and hesitated as though he wished himself back upon the road. Then, entering, he drew off his cloak.

It was John Murray of Broughton.

The three men round the fire made no motion, threatening or otherwise. They crouched on their haunches as before, watching him under their shaggy eyebrows.

Murray, who was no coward in ordinary circumstances, but only highly strung and with the Lowland caution, stood out of their range obviously ill at ease, awaiting the innkeeper's return.

HE WATCHED ONE OF THE MEN UNSHEATH HIS DIRK AND MAKE A GESTURE SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH.

To Rob he looked very worn and hollow-cheeked and his clothes cheap and ill-fitting like the dress of a small Ayrshire farmer. A sword was at his side and there was a bulge in his coat-pocket like the butt end of a pistol, but Rob took little comfort from that, knowing how poor a defence a single man like Murray would put up under a swift attack.

The innkeeper re-entered the room and, shutting the door, barred it across with a heavy slab of wood. For weal or woe they were there till morning.

He motioned Murray forward saying nothing, and the men about the fire made room for him, watching him all the time as dogs eye a stranger, ready at a word to fling themselves upon his throat.

Murray hesitated before he sat down and cast one fleeting glance about the room. A sudden inclination came to Rob to shout a warning and leap down to join him before it was too late. But he knew that they would complete their evil work before even he could take a part.

The innkeeper stirred the iron pot and drew out a hank of meat upon a dirk. This he handed to Murray, who took it in a dejected fashion and began to eat, and very quietly, while Rob watched him in a stupor of horror, he stepped behind him. But he made no attack. Instead he shook his head at the others and

jerked a thumb towards the room where Rob lay watching them. They evidently purposed to kill them both at one and the same time.

Underneath him the horse coughed and rattled its bit. Only an inch or two of wood between him and safety—only a thin decayed layer of wood. A rat was gnawing in a far corner; he heard it squeak in the darkness. Down below they were sitting quite speechless about the fire, waiting for the newcomer to seek his sleep. Murray was white and brooding, knowing no Gaelic, certain that danger was all about him, nodding with weariness and ever pulling up for dread of what was biding its time to strike.

In haste Rob examined the flooring of the loft. His fingers ran along the fringes of the boards. No flaw, no splintered grain, no crumbling of worm-eaten plank. Still the rat gnawed with steady persistence in the far corner. Perhaps there was a way there. He groped about, and his hands encountered a sack propped up against the wall. It was very heavy but he moved it gradually. The rat scuttled away and dropped out of the room. He heard it fall upon the soft mud below, and into his face there rose the warm smell of cows.

Breathlessly he examined the flooring behind the sack, and at the corner where the thing had stood his hands groped in vacancy. There was a hole a foot in breadth. Without delay he gripped the frayed edge, where the rat had

gnawed, in his strong muscular fingers and, setting his feet against the wall opposite him, strained to his fullest power.

With a sharp crack it broke away—a good two feet. Underneath the horse snorted with sudden fear ; it seemed to be only a few inches beneath his hand. Lying full length, he stretched down into the pitch darkness and touched its ear, soothing it with a whisper.

The way lay clear.

Then, regaining his feet, he stole back to the other end of the place and looked down upon the men below. It was a curious, somewhat pathetic sight that met his eyes. Murray was upon his feet and bidding them good night. He looked as though he knew in his heart what deed they intended, and was on the point of appealing to their chivalry (if they had any), and yet too proud to do so. In the end he only bowed and, taking a rushlight from the innkeeper, climbed slowly up the stairway and lifted the trap-door.

Now it was evident to Rob that if Murray, unnerved by illness and fatigue came upon him suddenly, he might hesitate or utter a cry, and for this reason he hid himself behind the sack until he was in the room and the trap-door shut, when he whispered, "Mr. Murray, Mr. Murray," as gently as he could.

There was a sharp sound like a gasp, and Murray replied in the same tone, "Who is it ?"

With his finger on his lips, Rob appeared before him.

"Quick!" he whispered, "lift the sack with me and put it upon the trap-door. It will serve for a few minutes. They are cut-throats down there."

For an instant Murray fumbled with his sword and then, controlling himself, he aided Rob, though his strength was not of much value at such a time.

Fortunately for them, the four men below were hard at it together, whispering in Gaelic, and evidently in high feather over the business ahead, so that they did not hear the moving of the sack. That accomplished, Rob drew Murray to the far corner.

"Your horse is below," he said; "drop down and soothe him while I wait in case they come. Give me your sword. Lead him out upon the road and I'll join you there."

It was strange to take orders from a boy, but Murray had no option in such circumstances. He was no Highlander and had no foolish pride. Without a word, he slipped into the blackness of the stall, and Rob heard him patting his beast and turning it towards the door.

At that same moment however there came a noise at the sack that sent Rob across the floor with the naked sword-blade in his hand.

The trap-door lifted very slowly; a hand crept under its ledge and gripped the rough

boarding a few inches from Rob. There was not a moment to delay. Falling upon his knees, he lunged into the darkness below. Instantly there rose a most horrible cry, something fell with a dull thud, and the trap-door banged upon the blade shivering it from the hilt downwards.

For his folly Rob was defenceless again.

But there was far worse to come, for at the noise of that terrible stricken voice there came a wild plunging of a horse outside and the dying thud of feet. Murray of Broughton was gone. Perhaps his beast bolted with terror; perhaps he waited and dreaded that Rob was killed—who can tell? He was of all men least able to endure suspense.

At that calamity there came to Rob a wild terror of the place and a panic to be gone. He reached the hole in the corner and dropped down upon the mud below. The fresh rain was blowing in upon his face from the open doorway where Murray had passed. He was out in it with a rush and into the friendly darkness, where he halted.

No movement came from the lonely inn—no cries or noise of any kind, only a brooding, death-like quiet as though the place were uninhabited or thronged with ghosts. In a kind of ghastly horror, he hesitated and then stole back, overcome by a curiosity too overwhelming to be crushed. Back he came and peered into the byre. But there was no sound—not even

a rat gnawing at the wood. It was cold and forsaken. He crept round the outer wall, safe in the night whatever might occur, and stared at the black door where he had entered at the dusk, seeing no gleaming firelight on the wall.

The rain had stopped of a sudden, and a faint glimmer of starlight showed in the doorway black and void. There was no door but only a huddle of stones. Nearer he crept, until at last he could look into the room itself.

And at that he took to his heels and ran blindly into the night—anywhere so long as he was well away from that grim and desolate house.

For in the room there was no fire, no staircase nor any sign of living soul. Nothing but an empty, roofless ruin under the open sky.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE END OF A TALE

ALL that weeping night of rain Rob travelled towards Glen Lyon glad for every foot of heather between him and the weird house upon the loch. Passing through the country of the Mackenzies he reached Killin, and there fell in with a band of gipsies sitting round their camp fire. They numbered about a score—men, women, and little brown children—and they welcomed him to share their meat in the kindliest manner, asking no questions and displaying no curiosity in his affairs. Only the chief knew Gaelic, and he was all the more ready to hear the news of the north from Rob, who gathered that his affection for the red-coats was by no means warm.

Rob accepted his kindness with a qualm of self reproach. It had suddenly occurred to him that in accepting such a wealth of hospitality he was endangering them to the vengeance of the Government. Such a prospect was not to be contemplated.

"Let me speak to you alone," he said to the chief.

In the privacy of the tent he told him all.

"I will not attempt to deny," said he, "that

there are those who would give much to capture me, not for any importance I may have, but because of another. . . ."

The gipsy followed his words with expressionless attention. Then rising he drew a paper from his pocket.

"Read," he said simply.

It was a Government notice for posting up under gibbets and suchlike, intimating that anyone who laid one, Rob Fraser, by the heels, dead or alive, would receive a reward of fifty pounds.

Rob turned cold at the dreadful wording of it. It described him minutely, and went on to say that he was last seen with the notorious rebel called "Muckle John."

"You knew?" said he at last.

The other laughed softly.

"What does it matter?" he replied, "but I thank you for your confidence, and when next you see Muckle John say that Gloom the Gipsy has not forgotten him."

"Are you a friend of Muckle John?"

"I may be counted such, though he has no lack of friends—or enemies."

"But I cannot imperil your people, it is more than is reasonable."

"Rob Fraser," said Gloom very gravely, "you are as good as taken. The soldiers are watching for you on the Highland Line, and from here to Stirling is alive with spies. To-morrow we will carry you through Balquhidder,

for if you fell foul of the wild caterans there it would be a short shift for you."

"Balquhidder—I have heard the name. . . ."

He laughed outright at that.

"It's clear ye are north country bred," he said, "there are more thieves Balquhidder way than in Lochaber itself."

Thankful indeed for his good fortune Rob bade his friend good-night, and lying down before the fire was soon fast asleep.

With the dawn they were marching towards Crianlarich where they took to the heather, and crossing the hills came down upon Loch Doine at the head of Balquhidder. As they streamed into the flat country at the top of the loch they passed a square thatched house at the foot of the slope facing the amber stream.

"That is Inverlochlarig where Rob Roy died," said Gloom. "I mind him well, a great red man with a heart of gold. But his sons are corbies, and I am hoping we do not meet them."

All up the side of the stream the cottages of the Macgregors clustered, with the thin veil of peat reek hanging above them in a kind of haze.

Without halting they passed over the flat marshy land that lay between the two ranges of mountain, and approached a small compactly built house upon the other side of the burn.

"We will stop here for the night," said Gloom,

" and maybe Invernenty will see us. He is no friend of the Macgregors, being son of John Maclaren who was murdered by Robin Oig."

Leaving Rob he crossed the narrow stream and knocking upon the door exchanged some words with a woman who opened it. But to all that he said she only shook her head, and he returned somewhat discomfited.

" She says that Invernenty is not at home," he said, calling him by the name of his place, " and yet I am doubting her unless he is taken."

Without delay they set their camp, and during the day several Macgregors came over and eyed them secretly, red men in a red tartan—querulous, hot-blooded fellows.

Rob, ill at ease in a strange country, kept in the background, but in the afternoon seeing a great crowd of them gathered about a place up the glen he accompanied Gloom, being wearied of sitting alone.

The Macgregors with a sprinkling of Maclarens were handling a curious smooth stone with holes for a finger and a thumb, and competing with one another in lifting it upon a small rock that stood in close proximity.

A tall dark sombre-looking man leaning upon a rude crutch and with a pale harassed face was regarding the scene from a little distance. He was dressed in riding clothes and with a great-coat buttoned up closely as though he were ill. Rob was on the point of asking who he was

when he became aware of the other's close scrutiny.

There was something dangerously interested in the manner he stared—taking him in with his dark cunning eyes, measuring his height in his mind—the set of his face, conjuring up every detail circumspectly.

"Gloom," said Rob in a whisper, "there's a man up on the brae has a notion who I am."

Very casually the gipsy turned about.

"Misfortune take it," he murmured, "but it is James More, son of Rob Roy, new come from Culloden. He was wounded, ye mind."

Presently without a word or any sign James Macgregor moved painfully away and entered Inverlochlarig.

"Come, Rob," said Gloom, "I would not trust that man a foot. He is up to mischief, and it's like enough we were better over Glenbucket than here."

Evening drew on, but there was no sign of trouble. At the rising of the moon, however, a tall gaunt woman with a plaid over her head asked for a word with the gipsy. They went apart together and conferred in low tones. And then as silently as she had come the woman vanished into the shadows.

"Rob," said Gloom, "there's danger threatening—when was there not in this wild country? Who do you think that was?"

Rob shook his head.

"Who but John Maclaren himself, new come from giving the red-coats the go-bye on the road to Carlisle. He says James is up to his pranks, and that the clan are scared to death at the very sight of you in the heart of their country. It is away we must go, Rob," and summoning his men they prepared to set out, leaving their camp fires burning in case their flight was suspected.

Over the cleft in the hills they went, and crossing the top of Beinn-an-Shithein, came down on Strathyre and Castle Murdoch.

"There is a strange man lives there," said the gipsy to Rob, "it's like enough he will send us about our business should we stop."

"Who are ye?" snarled a voice at that moment from the wall of the place, "ye canna bide hereabouts."

The moon had risen and under its clear rays Rob looked up and saw a white-haired man watching them from the rampart.

"What kind of night skulking is this?" he cried.

"I am Gloom," replied the gipsy.

"And who is that with you, he is none of your people."

"He is a friend, Murdoch."

"Bring him here—this is an ill time for friends," and he disappeared.

A few minutes later they saw him crossing the courtyard, a lamp swinging in his hand, limping through a shortness of his right leg, and

frowning at them as he peered through the shattered iron gates.

"Come nearer," he rasped, "you boy there with the borrowed claes."

Rob took a step towards him so that the light streamed down upon his features.

"Humph!" grunted Murdoch, cocking his eyes at the gipsy, "it is queer company ye're taken up with, my man. Do ye ken who that is with his innocent face and braw blue eyes? That's the lad of Muckle John."

"Whist!" warned Gloom, "the very rocks have ears."

At that moment a little girl came running over the courtyard.

"What did ye say of Muckle John?" she asked.

"Gang to your bed, Ethlenn," screamed the old man. "Janet, away with the bairn."

A woman ran out into the twilight. There was a noise of sudden crying and a door banged.

"Can we bide the night here?" asked the gipsy, but with poor enough heart in it.

"Bide the night," echoed Murdoch sharply, "bide the night in company with yon? Can ye —by the dogs of Lorn I think ye're crazed. What have I ever done to ye that ye should mak' me sic a daft-like proposal?"

"It is no use, Rob," said Gloom sadly.

With a kind of horror at his own notoriety Rob turned away and passed down the slope.

He heard the voice of Murdoch raised in shrill anger and falling into nothingness on the wind. Behind him trooped the gipsies, uncomplaining but dispirited, streaming towards Strathyre.

And so passing through the sleeping village they reached the narrow defile at the head of Loch Lubnaig, and ascending the hillside passed a dreary night.

It was just before the dawn of the next day that Rob came to a decision, which appeared to him the only wise and honest thing to do. He wrote a brief note to Gloom thanking him for his great kindness, and stating that he would be far towards the south by the morning.

Then stepping between the gipsies' sleeping forms he came down upon the loch and set off at a trot for Kilmahog.

Many days afterwards—days full to the brim of danger and heavy travelling, Rob reached Edinburgh and wandered about the High Street. He had managed to purchase another set of clothes, and for the present he deemed himself safe, and on the morrow he would keep his tryst with Muckle John at Leith.

It was about midday that he saw a great coach lumbering over the rude cobbles jolting and groaning, and about it a party of dragoons. A sudden fear gripped him that perchance this was a prisoner, who knew—perhaps Muckle John himself.

He pushed his way to the front of the crowd. Nearer clattered the dragoons, a braver sight than when they had entered that same street in the year '45. The horses straining at the coach were level with him now, and he bent forward, his eyes glued to the window. It was but a flash, but he never forgot it.

For lolling forward, leering grotesquely either in derision or some kindred emotion, sat Simon, Lord Lovat, bound for London and Tower Hill.

His small shrewd eyes travelling over the crowd settled for an instant upon Rob, and contracted suddenly as though he half recollected him, but was not sure. Then he was gone, and that was the last of the Fraser.

The scene sobered what little foolhardiness there was left in Rob. It made him walk less abroad. The arm of the law was long, but the arm of the Government was longer.

More than once he had a curious intuition on that afternoon that he was being followed. It might be only an accident, but he had run into two slouching frowsy rascals on two separate occasions, and each time they had stared very hard and looked back at him over their shoulders.

At last overcome by fear of capture he had taken to his heels and run up one close and down another, being quite unfamiliar with the City, but only anxious to shake off any shadowing. After he had doubled and dodged for a full half-hour he took cover upon an ancient stairway

beside the White Horse Inn, and there he waited to see what would happen and whether there were really any upon his trail. It was about five minutes later that the noise of a man panting up the lane set him keeking down to see who came so hastily. To his dismay it was one of the loafers of the afternoon, and hard on his heels the other. They passed at a run and their footsteps died away.

Then speeding in the opposite direction Rob found a lodging in another inn, and slept far into the following day—the day on which he was to meet Muckle John and win to freedom at last. After all the turmoil and distress of the weeks following Culloden, it was a strange enough sensation to think of the great towns ahead in Holland or France, where there was no dire necessity to keep one eye over your shoulder and the other cocked upon the end of the street, and where a Jacobite was not considered food for the nearest gallows tree.

So thinking (and yet with misgiving for all that) Rob passed cannily out of Edinburgh and along the way to Leith, and again the dread fear that he was being followed took possession of him. The sun was falling when he saw the lonesome gibbet tree stuck up against the skyline. On it the body of some luckless creature was swinging in its chains—he could just catch the dreary creaking on the wind.

He looked backward for the twentieth time.

But all the desolate landscape seemed empty of living soul or beast.

And yet he could have sworn that he had seen a head dodge behind the tussock of coarse rank grass just on the top of the mound. He was so sure of it he ran back, but when he reached it there was nothing. Then bending as a true hillsman reads the ground he saw the fresh mark of a boot in the wet sand.

There was danger lurking amongst the dunes, and still no sign of Muckle John.

Out on the Firth of Forth a ship was running up her canvas to the breeze, and it set him wondering in an idle fashion whether Muckle John might not be already aboard starting for France.

And then the sunlight faded and the greyness of the gloaming crept up from the sea.

Clink, clink, went the chains upon the forlorn gibbet tree, and with a deeper rustier note as the wood groaned and shuddered in its joints.

He walked slowly up the sloping sandy path. Above him, black above the evening sky swung the dead man—some poor soul less guilty of wrong maybe than he himself.

Then sitting upon a heap of sand beside the dreary burden with its dismal refrain he waited for what might befall. That there was danger afoot he knew instinctively, but his great reliance upon Muckle John seemed to almost dissipate such perils. There was a mountain of strength in Muckle John.

The darkness was falling fast when of a sudden, like the spring of a leopard for swiftness, a man was upon his back and with the crook of his arm around his throat. Uttering one faint cry Rob tumbled backwards, and before he could struggle to his feet, his legs were gripped by another man and a third flung himself bodily upon his chest.

As far as Rob was concerned the question of France was over and done with. It was a sad enough ending to all his brave adventures to be bowled over by three vagabonds on Leith sands, and trussed like a hen.

But there was more in it than that.

For out of the twilight came a tall man walking at his leisure, and even before he spoke Rob knew him for Captain Strange.

"Well," he said quietly, "so this is the end, Rob, and what a braw place to be sure. It was almost tempting providence with that clinking cratur to warn ye."

He motioned to the men to leave them, and sitting down began to talk in an affable pleasant manner as though he were discussing the weather or the price of stocks.

"Hark ye, Rob," he said, "I ken fine who ye're waiting for. It's Muckle John no less, and what I have in my mind I must say quickly. Now we want this little business carried through expeditiously and with discretion. We do not want any pranks, mind ye, and ye ken Muckle

John as a man as full of tricks as a monkey. I want ye to sit here, Rob, until he comes, and promise me no to say a word to set him thinking. If ye carry this out I will say what I can for you when the time comes."

"I will shout a warning while I have breath in my body," cried Rob.

"Very good," replied Strange, "very good; in that case I will gag you surely enough, and here goes."

With that he stuffed a pad of cloth into his mouth and fastened a bandage round his cheeks. Then springing to his feet he listened intently. Very faintly the sound of whistling drifted up from the sands. Up above the gibbet chains creaked to and fro, and in the tragic silence of the twilight the man came trudging to his doom.

Strange darted into the dunes for his men: It was like to go hard with Muckle John.

It was all over as the newcomer stooped over Rob. With a muffled shout he fell and rose again, and writhing spasmodically was stunned to silence. From the size of him Rob knew it could be none other than Muckle John.

"A light!" cried Strange, in high glee over it all.

They swung a lantern nearer and turned their prisoner over upon his back.

And there, glaring up at them with apoplectic rage lay James Fraser of Castleleathers. It was a moment full of gall for Strange.

As for Castleleathers, worthy man, being much bruised and scratched and with a bump like an egg on his head, it was a mercy that he had no breath to express his feelings on the matter. But when he did he only added to Strange's mortification. For on hearing of the plan to capture Muckle John which (being a professed Hanoverian) he could not criticize adversely, he expressed a deep regret that he had not beguiled the rebel with his conversation, having met him upon the road a mile back.

"A mile back," cried Strange, "then he will come here yet."

"No," said Castleleathers in his methodical tone, "no, I think not, for he has boarded a ship for France."

Strange uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"I told you he would throw you over, Rob, when the time came," said he with a sour look.

Certainly it appeared like it.

But Castleleathers had more to say.

"Will you give me a hearin'," he broke in peevishly. "Muckle John would have come, but I counselled him not."

"You did?" screamed Strange. "But this is open treason, Major Fraser."

"No," said Castleleathers stoutly, "oh no, I assure you there is no more loyal servant of the King than I. But I saw no service that he could render Rob, except to endanger him as an associate of a notorious Jacobite."

"Indeed," said Strange, "but Rob is none so far removed from that himsel'. He is like enough to take the place of the hanged one above ye, Major Fraser."

"Pardon me, no," replied Castleleathers blandly, "here I have a pardon for Rob signed by the Duke himsel'."

"It's a forgery," cried Strange hotly, "let me see it."

"In my hands, Captain Strange—no, stand back a wee—hold the light higher, now can ye see? Will you dispute that, my man? There is his royal signature, bless him!"

Strange eyed it gloomily.

"There is something queer about this," he said. "I will see the Duke."

Castleleathers smiled.

"All the way to London?" he asked. "The Duke will not thank ye."

Over their heads the haunted chains jingled merrily. It must have been a rare joke to send them clinking like that. Suddenly from the ends of nowhere there was a sound like a smothered laugh.

"What was that?" whispered Strange, looking furtively about.

"I heard nothing," replied Castleleathers, then starting to his feet, "but surely there is the noise of a horse."

"A horse," said Strange, "who knows it may be Muckle John himself."

"No," corrected Castleleathers composedly, "no, I think not. I think—in fact I am sure—it is my wife."

"Your wife!" cried Rob, who had worked the gag out at last, and who had been apparently overlooked in the discussion.

Castleleathers switched about.

"Bless us," he said, "I had clean forgotten ye, Rob, you were so quiet. What's amiss with you?"

"I am bound hand and foot."

"Mercy me," said Castleleathers, "but you have a queer way with you, Captain Strange. There ye are, Rob," and he set him free, "and now what's there so wonderful in my having a wife? She's your ain aunt Macpherson. It's my nephew ye are, Rob, and if I ever hear of this Jacobite business again I'll skelp ye mair than she ever did, poor woman."

It was indeed Miss Macpherson (or rather Mrs. James Fraser of Castleleathers), and at the sight of her Strange bowed very coldly, remembering the escape from Fort Augustus, and calling his men disappeared towards Edinburgh.

"Sit ye doon a moment," said Castleleathers, "though it's a dreary enough place for family reunions."

But Rob only stared out to sea where the moon was pouring a broad pathway of silver upon the quivering water.

"Did Muckle John not give ye a message for

me?" he asked. "It will be long ere we see him again."

Castleleathers took a keek over his shoulder.

"To be honest, Rob," he said, "I never saw him at all. Maybe he's coming or maybe he is no sae far off as ye think."

"He was the queer yin," remarked Mrs. Fraser, "though he had a way with him, mind ye. That night in Inverness, Rob—that was a scene. There was I dancing like a young yin, and all to a scrap of a tune he was whistling something like this . . ." and she tried to whistle, but failed most signally.

"No," said Rob, "it was more like this," but he had not the twist of it at all.

"Ye're all out together," cried a voice in the night. "Was it no this?" and the west wind carried the rhythm of the reel into the night.

"Where is he?" whispered Castleleathers, looking about.

"It's no canny," said his wife with a shiver.

"Muckle John!" cried Rob.

The tune stopped, and suddenly as it were in the midst of them with the ghastly thing over their heads creaking and clacking, the voice of Muckle John was singing, and these were the words he sang:

Swing—swing in the hail and snow,
Dead banes clinkin' frae dawn to nicht,

Creak—creak to the hoodie crow
From rising sun to grey moonlicht.

A lark soars blithe frae the sands o' Leith,
"Life's but a braw claymore," sang he.
"Death is nought but an empty sheath,"
Creak, creak, creak, groans the Gibbet Tree.

The waves gang jinkin' ower the shore,
A seagull laughs as he skims the sea,
But a feckless loon will laugh nae more
While he swings to and fro on the Gibbet Tree.

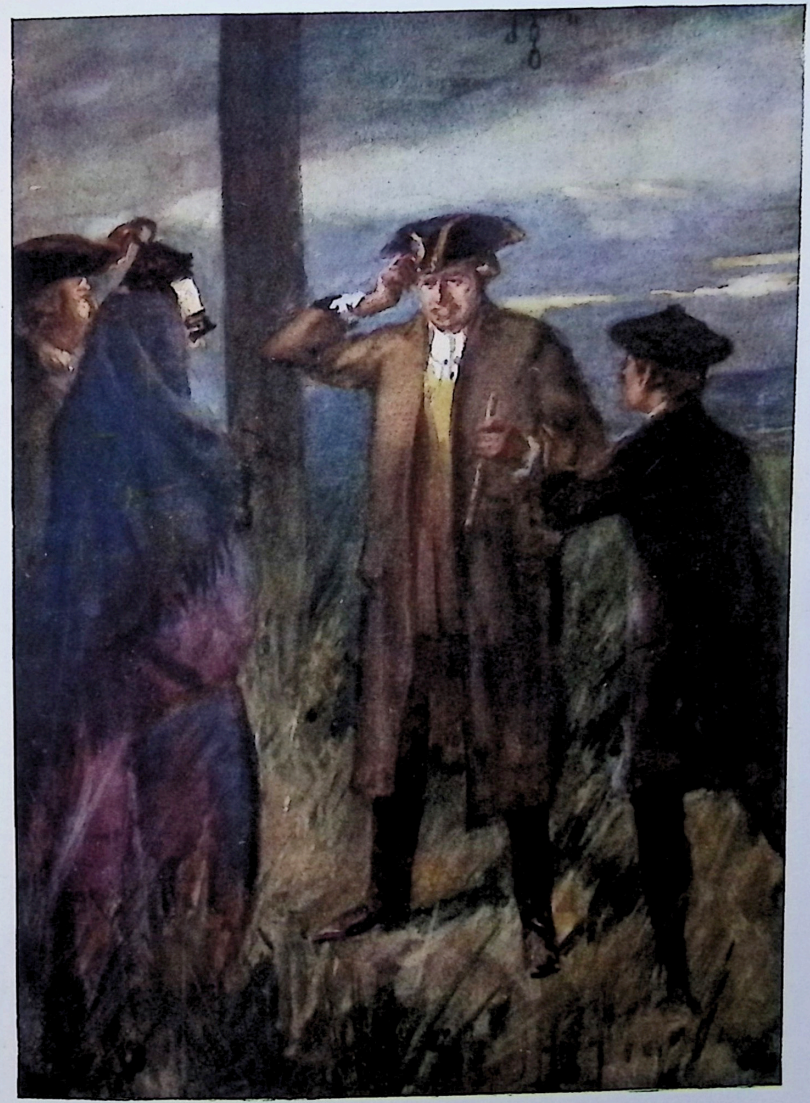
The nicht creeps back o'er the cold grey tide,
The wind sighs over the barren lea,
Oh wad that the dark could for ever hide
The feckless loon on the Gibbet Tree.

There comes a lad at the turn o' nicht,
"It's hereabouts that he said he'd be—
There's a ship at sea with a golden licht,
But no Muckle John 'neath the Gibbet Tree."

Swing—swing in the hail and snow,
Dead banes clinkin' frae dawn to nicht,
Creak—creak to the hoodie crow
From rising sun to grey moonlicht.

It was above them up in the air or they were going mad.

Suddenly the song ceased and with a great rattle of chains the gibbet's burden dropped with a clatter, and at that Mrs. Fraser came



WITH A GREAT RATTLE OF CHAINS THE GIBBET'S BURDEN DROPPED WITH A CLATTER.

dangerously near to swooning for the first and last time in her life.

IT WAS MUCKLE JOHN!

"Good evening to you," he cried, "and rare luck to the bride and bridegroom. Well, Rob, so it's fine to be a free man and a good ending to a brave cause."

"But you, Muckle John—what of you? Do you go to sea to-night?"

He shook his head.

"Not yet," he said, and held Rob by the hand for a moment saying nothing. Then taking his whistle from his pocket he broke into a jig, and in the yellow light of the lantern he started dancing under the empty gibbet tree.

It took doucer people than the Frasers to stand still when that kind of thing was afoot. Once again Rob and his aunt tripped it finely, and Castleleathers, that mountain of flesh and brawn, was not backward.

It was a strange sight that, with the forlorn place, and the crying from the sea, and the blinking weird light and the black figures skipping like ghosts beneath a starlit sky.

They danced till all the breath was clean gone out of them, and they stopped just because the music was no longer there. For unseen to any Muckle John had stolen softly away playing as he went, passing like a shadow, or a dream, or a memory, into the vast darkness.

They stood for a space catching the lingering

notes of it, and then it was gathered into the night, and became part of the sea, and the wind, and the soft song of the rustling heath, and so was gone.

And that was the last of Muckle John.

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